20 MAPS FOR 2d. "PEARSON'S WAR ATLAS."

SHORT STORIES

A WEEKLY MAGAZINE FOR HOME AND TRAIN

No. 586. FOR WEEK ENDING MARCH 24TH, 1900. [ONE PENNY.

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"Gentlemen,

"I enclose P.O., for which I request you to send "me by post Four Bottles of Guy's Tonic. I "have prescribed the Tonic to several people, who "have derived much Benefit from it, but I may "mention that all which I order myself is used "by my Wife.

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"J. A. OSBORNE, M.D."

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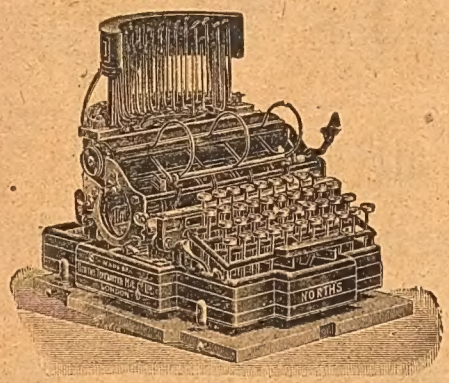

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Advertisements should be sent to "Short Stories" Advertisement Department, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

SHORT STORIES

No. 586. ONE PENNY

For the Week Ending March 24th, 1900.

THE WONDLEFORD MYSTERY.

IT was a coincidence, and a very curious one, which brought those two men together at Wondleford.

Jim Banks used to say it was the "darnedest, rummiest start" that ever he had come across. Jim was there, too, in the capacity of the necessary outsider, and it was through him that the story became known, for Tony Blake, with his emotional Irish temperament, never cared to speak of that night's experience.

Tony had spent a night at Jim's father's station *en route* for one, two days' journey on, where a mob of cattle was awaiting him. Jim was anxious to go on the roads for a bit, and Tony was on the look-out for a man, so it was quickly arranged that the young fellow should go, and they made an early start next day, for the only good camping ground with food and water combined was a long forty miles away.

As they left the slip-rails of the home paddock a traveller, who had been camping on the creek, hove in sight. He was a tall, black-bearded man, with curiously white hair, shabbily dressed, and with the shaking hand of an habitual drunkard. As he was evidently making for Old Wondleford crossing too, it

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was only natural that he should join the other horsemen. Three is not company, as a rule, but, as the stranger preferred to ride along in silence a pace or two behind Banks and Blake, they were undisturbed by his presence.

Blake had taken up a selection adjoining Jim's birthplace, and Jim had heard him spoken of as a mad Irishman, who sold his selection for a song, and made tracks for the old country, where it was generally understood that he had found a fortune and spent it, turning up again years afterwards in Queensland on the droving tack, and bidding fair to stick to that particular line for life.

After dinner they left the grassy slopes and ring-barked paddocks of Banks's property, and got into a country of thick scrub and stony, barren ridges. Once they passed a hut in ruins, and then ran up against the remains of a kangaroo fence.

Tony followed the fence with his eye, as it sagged like a broken-backed snake across a dry swamp.

"What's come to Roper letting the fence get into this state?" he exclaimed. "It was in good repair—bran new, in fact—when I saw it last. I'll speak about it to him myself to-night."

Jim turned in his saddle, and stared into Tony's handsome, florid face.

"Speak to Roper to-night! Why, man, where have you been? Roper's been gone these ten years, and Wondleford deserted. Haw, Haw! Speak to Roper about his fences. Now that is good."

"Is that so?" said Tony. "Well, you see I never came up this way but once, and that's a matter of twelve years ago, just when I was making tracks for the nearest railway station—a good three hundred miles further off than it is now, my boy. I never got as far east as your father's place before, and for particular reasons I did not call in that time, but I remember the road all the same. So Roper is gone, and his pretty wife with him, I suppose? Ah, she was a jewel," and Tony sighed retrospectively.

"Mrs Roper!" cried Jim. "Gone; I should think she was, and a matter of two years before Roper went. By gum, Blake, did not you hear about her being murdered? It must have happened before you left. I was a nipper of ten at the time, but I remember how excited all the district was about it. You see it was never found out, and everyone used to feel a bit scarey for a time. There were no police nearer than Crow's Nest in those times, and just then they were after the chaps that stuck up the Crow's Nest gold escort. Do you remember that?"

"Oh, yes; it happened a week before I left. But I called in at Wondleford on New Year's Day. Mrs. Roper was at home, and right as could be; the prettiest, jolliest little woman I'd set eyes on for many a day. I'd heard that Roper was as jealous as a man could be over her, and didn't encourage visitors, so I was just as glad he wasn't there. Bad luck to those who harmed her; an' for what was it done, and what was Roper doing not to bring the murdering rogues to justice?"

"Oh, he couldn't do anything. They fired the house, and burnt everything, but it was proved that she had a bullet in her brain before she was burnt. There was another dead body, a man's, found too; he had been shot as well. Some thought he was the murderer, and had shot himself in remorse, but it was impossible to find out. One of Roper's horses, saddled and bridled, was standing in the stable to complicate matters more."

"An' what was Roper doin' to leave such a young thing alone?"

"Well, he had to go to an out-station, with all hands to put out a bush-fire and burn a boundary. He left a gin, who used to cook for them, with her, but Mrs. Roper took a fancy to get pie melons, and sent the gin out to One Mile Creek to get 'em, telling her to camp the night, and bring home some fish as well next morning. Instead of that, the gin marched off to the out-station, and hung about looking for melons there.

"The boss found her, and sent her straight back with a message to Mrs. Roper, saying he'd rather she did not stop alone; but the gin was frightened Mrs. Roper would be angry if she returned without the melons, so camped on the creek, and didn't get home till late the next day, to find Wondleford burnt to the ground, and the boss gone off for the police and for help. He had got uneasy, and gone home before daybreak—suspected the gin of tricks, I suppose. It was night, of course, when he got to our place. I remember seeing him—a tall chap with black hair and queer deep-set eyes. Mother said he was like a madman.

They left the grassy slopes and got into a country of thick scrub and stony barren ridges

"Then afterwards I used to hear 'em saying that he was drinking himself to death, and was letting Wondleford go to the dogs, and then he cleared out altogether, and no one knows what became of him, and fancy you never hearing about it. Why, man, where have you been?"

Tony laughed. "Well, I was at sea a week or so afterwards. Do you remember the date at all, or about when it happened?"

"New Year's night," said Jim promptly. "And you say you saw her on New Year's Day. Didn't notice any strangers about, did you?"

"Yes—that is—no, of course, but it must have been the time, because the gin was away, and Mrs.

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Roper got us some lunch herself. Poor little woman; poor pretty little thing."

Jim looked at him with bright unsympathetic eyes. "Why, you only saw her once," he said. "Anyway no one ever found out; a murderer isn't always discovered, you see."

"No, my lad, not when that murder was an act of justice, an eye for an eye, a soul for a soul, a—"

"What's up with you," said Jim, interrupting the rapid utterance of the stranger who had abruptly broken in upon his recital. "What do you know about it?"

"Nothing," said the man sullenly, dropping back a pace or two to his original position. "Only I've known murders that were justice, and that's the reason they're never found out. So put that in your pipe and smoke it, youngster."

Jim resented being called youngster above all things, and answered accordingly, but the black-bearded man was evidently not listening. Tony gave a sharp look at the vacant, deep-set eyes, and nudged Jim, tapping his forehead significantly. "The man's a bit of a pea-eater," he said, and Jim's wounded vanity was appeased.

He had more to tell yet, and returned to the murder theme, asking Tony if he was afraid of ghosts.

"Not afraid of 'em," said Tony. "But why do you ask; does the poor little woman walk?"

"Not that I know of, only there's a yarn that travellers sometimes see the homestead just as it was, before it was burnt. I've never camped here myself-but we may see it. Hope we do." A wish the Irish man did not echo.

A black thunder cloud was shadowing the west as the sun went down, but Wondle Creek, clattering and sighing over the stones, told them the journey was ended, and the travellers made for the grassy pleateau on the ridge, strange to say, the black-bearded man leading as straight as a pointer on the scent. He set about making a fire at once, and seemed inclined to do all the work, leaving the other two to stroll about and cut a few bushes for beds.

"The station ought to be down here," said Blake. "If that storm comes on it would be as well to have a roof over us. I suppose there's an outhouse or two standing?"

"Not a skillion even," said Jim. "It was only a small place, mostly under one roof, and the few outhouses soon fell to pieces. Father was past here a year ago, and he said——"

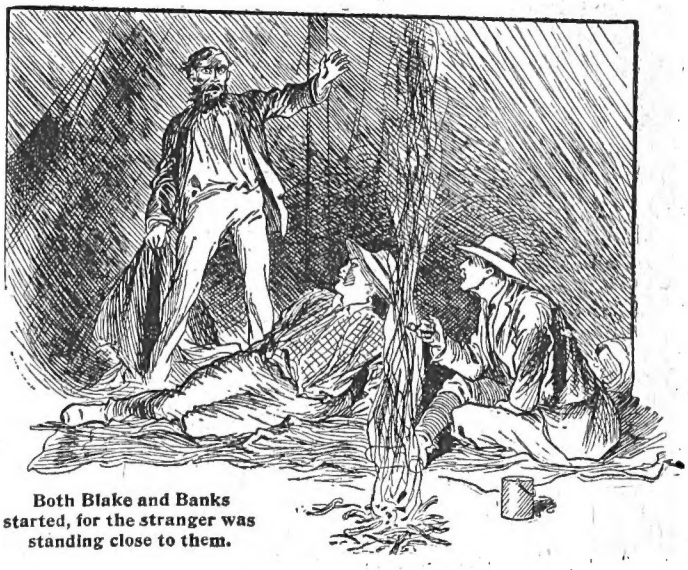
"You young rascal, what's been your game. It's meself would like to know?"

Blake had pushed through a screen of saplings and was gazing downwards. "Well, what do you call that?" he added.

Young Jim looked curiously across the little plain, through which Wondle Creek twisted like a silver ribbon.

"Rum—very rum," he said, after a pause.

Words which did not at all suit as descriptive of the scene before them. Dusk was already falling, but the long, low shingle roof, and the two tall chimneys of Wondleford-house could be plainly seen through the garden trees. Even the rails of the stockyard and the dark out-buildings were distinct enough, and a pretty picture it made against another green slope crowned with thick scrub as background.



Both Blake and Banks started, for the stranger was standing close to them.

As the men watched in surprised silence a moment, a big chestnut stallion dashed out of the shadow of the garden trees, followed by a troop of long-maned, flowing-tailed horses, and the thunder of their galloping hoofs brought Jim to himself.

"Brumbies," he said, briefly; "and brumbies don't flit in and out of gardens like tame birds. There's no house there."

"Will you bet?" said Blake.

"A quid," answered Jim.

"But you're a fool to do it. Look at 'em tearin' back again. If you watch you'll see 'em going up the hill to the scrub; through the hall door, I suppose," this with sarcasm.

Sure enough, when the wild horses had finished drinking, they made straight back, and went apparently through the garden—if not the house—but impetuous Blake was already down the ridge, and seeking for a crossing-place at the creek, before Jim could show a larger scorn.

The Irishman crossed on a fallen log, and ran quickly towards the garden.

It was growing dark very quickly, and there seemed to be no fences to bar his progress. A tangle of creeper stretching from a pine tree to a rose bush caused him to turn a little. The place was neglected certainly, scrub, oak, and other saplings springing up everywhere. Then he came across a knotted and twisted apple tree close against a charred and blackened post. Surely he remembered that, there used to be a slip of an apple tree against the back door? Mrs. Roper had told him to be careful not to let his horse near it that day; but somehow he had missed the house, and was out on the slope at the back, but there was the tall chimney and the shingle roof in front of him again. Once more he plunged into the shadowy garden; once more he struck the charred posts and the deformed apple tree; but, not to be beaten, he tramped about in all directions, finding nothing, however, and, thoroughly mystified, made the best of his way back to the camp and the triumphant Jim.

"Father would call it an optical illusion," said that

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worthy; "but I don't believe in meddling with that sort of thing. Cheer up; you're not the first that's been fooled. I'd like to send old sulky-face to look at it, only the sight would probably send him off his dot altogether; and we don't want to camp with a lunatic. Come and have your tea."

After it was over "sulky-face," as Jim had christened the stranger, rolled himself in his blankets, and apparently fell asleep. Blake and Banks smoked and talked a little longer, and the former grew communicative.

"Fact is, Banks," he said, "it did give me a turn to hear your yarn to-day. I've good reason to think I know whose that other body was, and he was a friend of mine. I might as well tell you the yarn, for it can't affect anyone now, and I don't know any more than you who the murderer was."

"Oh! there was someone with you then?" said Jim. "I thought as much."

"Yes, it was young Walter Benham — a ne'er-do-well brother of Mrs. Roper. He came to me the night before I was starting east. He had saved my life from blacks once, and I owed him a good turn. He was in the gold escort affair, more by ill-luck than any premeditated mischief, but he was wanted, of course, and had no way of getting a horse. He had written to his sister, telling her all, and asking her to get him a mount. Roper didn't approve of him, and so she was to keep it as dark as she could. I let him ride my pack mare, and disguised him a bit, and we made tracks for Wondleford, and by looking out well never met a soul. Naturally, as Benham had put me in an awkward position rather, I was anxious to get away as soon as I could before the police came this way, so I only stayed an hour at Roper's, and pushed on, leaving Benham to get away after dark, which I always supposed he did, for he had plenty of money, and meant to get off to America if possible.

"Now, it seems to me that he shared his sister's fate, because the saddled horse must have been his. I wonder if he was followed by some of the gang, and shot for fear he should inform; but then why was she murdered too?

"By George, he was a handsome lad, like her, but fair as she was dark, and I never saw two so fond of one another."

"Well," said Jim, slowly, "I don't know, but I think you should tell the police what you know. It's very likely the murder was committed by some of the escort robbers, and——"

"Good Heavens! Her brother! Her brother!"

Both Blake and Banks started, and sprang to their feet, for the stranger was standing close to them.

"What on earth's up with you now," said Jim, "can't you sleep without having nightmare?"

"Can you swear that on New Year's Day twelve years ago you left Mary Roper's brother with her at Wondleford—a brother she was fond of, whom she would kiss and caress and cry over? Can you swear, man—are you sure?"

As the stranger spoke he seized Blake's shoulder, and drew him round, so that he could look with his burning eyes straight into the Irishman's face.

"Sure, of course I'm sure. I knew Walter Benham at one time as well as I know myself; but what has it got to do with you?"

"I was Mary Roper's husband—that is all," said the man, loosening his grasp on the other's shoulder, and in the surprised silence which followed he turned and rushed away in the darkness.

"Well, I'm sugared!" said Jim Banks. "Fancy that pea-eater being Roper! But I swear I believe he's telling the truth. Twelve year's drink and a beard alter a man, but those queer eyes reminded me of something. It's him, right enough."

"Poor chap!" said Blake. "I must go after him. The storm will be on us in a minute. You give the tent pegs an extra drive, and I'll fetch him. I'm willing to tell anything I know—Why, what's that?"

A red glare in the western sky made them turn and run to the edge of the ridge. The stranger was standing looking downwards, close to the screen of saplings.

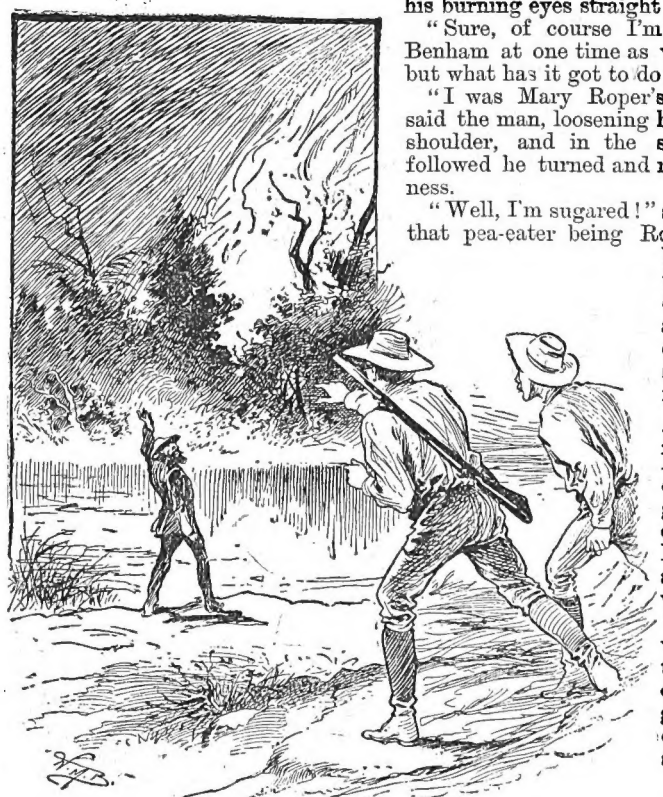
"Look!" he shouted wildly. "Look! False wife and broken vows! It was justice, only justice. Look!"

"Mad as a hatter," began Banks in an undertone, and then he stopped, open-mouthed, for the little creek was reflecting flames, and tongues of fire shot up above the trees, plainly showing against the shingle roof of the house on the plain. There was no mistake this time. A house was on fire, and there might be human beings in peril.

"Come along!" shouted Blake, and he sprang down the little slope towards the creek.

With a cry, the stranger followed, and outstripped him. Jim, more cautious, took his time.

It was pitch dark this side of the creek, and the glare of the fire dazzled his eyes. A peal of deafening thunder and a jagged flash of lightning added further to the disorder of the scene.



Roper stopped for a moment on the bank of the creek. "I cannot wait," he shouted.

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"Hi! Roper!" he shouted. "Not so fast; you know the lay of the country better than we do."

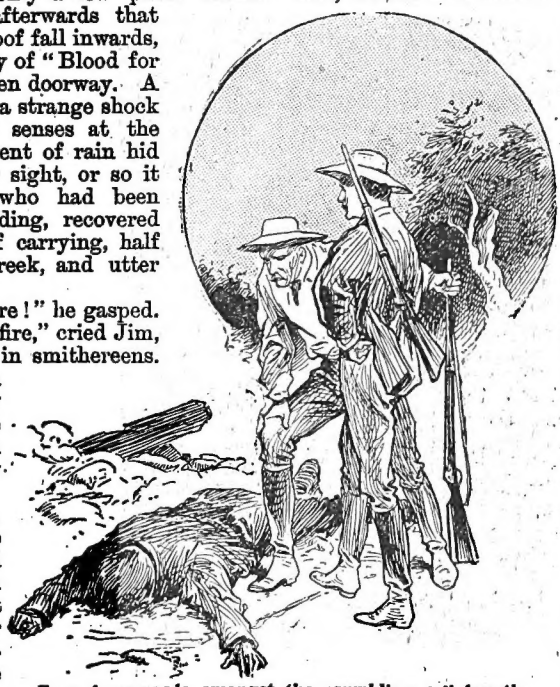
Roper stopped for a moment on the bank of the creek. "I cannot wait," he shouted. "Blood for blood! Don't you hear them calling?"

A minute afterwards Tony and Jim had waded through the shallow waters, and rushed towards the burning house. They were only a few paces behind Roper, and both declared afterwards that they plainly saw the red-hot roof fall inwards, just as Roper, with a wild cry of "Blood for Blood!" sprang in at the open doorway. A fearful crash of thunder and a strange shock deafened and stunned their senses at the moment, and a blinding torrent of rain hid house and garden from their sight, or so it seemed, for when Blake, who had been nearest to the burning building, recovered himself, Jim Banks was half carrying, half dragging him towards the creek, and utter darkness reigned.

"Roper—the house—the fire!" he gasped.

"There's no house and no fire," cried Jim, "nothing but an apple tree in smithereens. I'm off that lot. Roper can take care of himself. Any way, you don't catch me hunting lunatics through houses that ain't houses any more."

Half-stunned as he was, Blake allowed himself to be led back to the camp, and when the fury of the storm abated, with daylight, he went down with Jim to look for traces of the madman. Perhaps he had got into the scrub, with his wild fancies and poor tortured brain. Had they all been more or less demented the night before? for in the clear light of morning neither from the ridge nor anywhere else could a trace of the haunted station be seen! The creek babbled over the stones, the birds sang merrily among the trees of the old garden surrounding the few charred posts of the long-ruined homestead, and the sun sent bright shafts of light everywhere.



Face downwards amongst the crumbling soil lay the blackened singed body of a man.

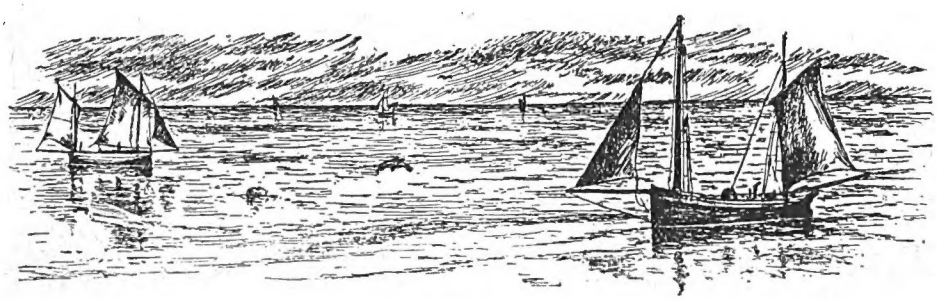
"Lightning!" said Jim, briefly, pointing to the splintered trunk of the apple tree. "Lucky for us we were out of its reach. Good Heavens! here's Roper."

Face downwards amongst the crumbling soil lay the blackened, singed body of a man, perhaps where twelve years ago those other two charred bodies had lain, on the hearthstone of the home, destroyed by his own hand. For, somehow, the truth came with a flash to both the men standing there, and they saw as in a dream the arrival of the maddened, jealous husband, the loving parting of the brother and sister, the stealthy figure, wild with hate and passion, and the eyes burning with the light of madness. That Roper had shot his wife and the lad with her, and in his frenzy had set fire to the house, they had no doubt. The final act of the tragedy—Roper's death—after his late discovery of his wife's innocence, they did not try to understand. It was only, as Jim Banks said "The rummiest start he'd ever come across, anyhow."

* * * * *

After the police had been informed, Roper's remains were interred by the creek, close to two other grassy mounds. Wondleford was quite an important place in the scantily settled district for a time, and several people interested in such things camped for a week on the ridge, in hopes of seeing the shingle roof and tall chimney-stack amongst the clump of trees on the plain, but from the night of Tony Blake's and Jim Bank's weird experience, I have never heard that it was seen again.

Ethel Mills.



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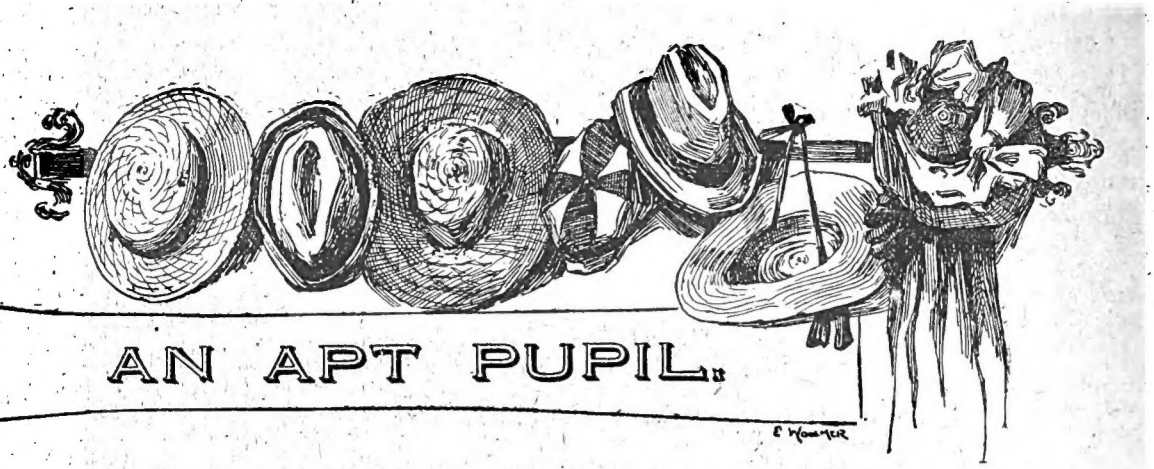

When people heard the name of Professor Draycott they pictured to themselves a man past middle life, and they were surprised to find, on meeting the gentleman, that he was very little over thirty, and looked younger than that. He was indeed a young man to have attained to such a position as that which he occupied, but that naturally was all the more to his credit.

Draycott had obtained during the past year or two a reputation for curing complaints and diseases by means of hypnotism. He was a firm believer in that science, and occasionally delivered lectures on the subject. He had been invited to Whitelock, where mesmerism was having a vogue, to deliver a course of four lectures in the public hall, and he had managed to sandwich this course between two other courses which he was to deliver in different parts of the country. He was exceedingly pleased to have the opportunity of going to Whitelock, as that city was noted as a centre of intelligence, and he prophesied that hypnotism would make a great stride in public favour if he could succeed in making a hit there.

Three of the lectures had been given and he was now preparing to deliver the fourth. It was Saturday, and it would be necessary for him to leave Whitelock on Sunday afternoon in order to reach Malton, where he was to deliver another course, early on Monday.

In his concluding lecture, Professor Draycott always endeavoured to impress upon his audience a fact concerning which he himself had not the slightest doubt; this was that everybody possessed the power of hypnotism to a greater or less extent.

He was always enthusiastic about his subject and spoke in a tone that in many cases carried conviction with it, but on this occasion, having due regard to the important city in which he was endeavouring to propagate the science, he was actually preparing a short speech on this particular point in order that every word should tell.

The hall was a large one, but it was simply crowded on that Saturday evening. The professor was delighted; it proved how great was the interest excited on the previous evenings, and augured well for the future of hypnotism.

Draycott warmed to his work as he had never done before; he explained the theory and he gave practical examples of his power on various members of the audience who "honoured him by stepping up to the platform." Then came the final remarks.

With an earnestness that abundantly demonstrated his convictions, Professor Draycott told the audience that every one of them had this strange power latent within his or her being; that if it were developed it would enable each one to do much for the alleviation of suffering and the cure of disease in his own circle; and that everyone was under the moral obligation to cultivate the gift for the benefit of mankind. There were some, he told his hearers, who disputed his assertion, but it was perfectly true and they would find it so if they made up their minds to try.

It was late that night before the professor could woo sleep; his ears still rang with the plaudits of the audience at the conclusion of what had been a remarkable séance, and he was so elated with his success that it was a wonder he was able to sleep at all. But when unconsciousness did fall upon him, it lasted for many hours—for he was thoroughly exhausted with his efforts—and he slept until nine o'clock on the Sunday morning.

After breakfast he went for a long walk, returning to his hotel for luncheon at one o'clock. That repast finished, he set to work leisurely to pack his bag for the journey.

The course of lectures had been arranged on a somewhat peculiar basis so far as payment was concerned. He usually had his fee paid in advance, but as the proprietors of the hall at Whitelock had had some doubt as to the success of the venture the professor had agreed to accept a precentage of the money received for admission. This was paid to him at the close of the lecture on Saturday evening, and in cash.

The result had been far better than anyone had anticipated, and he found himself with £100 in notes and coin as his share of the proceeds. The notes he placed in his pocket-book, while the gold and silver—being heavy—he stowed away in his bag.

He had finished packing his bag and was looking round to see if he had forgotten anything, when a porter knocked at the door and handed him a card. It bore the name of Miss Dora Callan.

"The lady says that she would like to see you on a very urgent matter," said the porter deferentially.

"But I do not know this lady," returned Draycott, surveying the card with a perplexed air. "Are you sure she mentioned my name?"

"Yes, sir; she said I was to give it to Professor Draycott, the hypnotist," replied the man.

"Very well I will come down," said Draycott. And two minutes later he found himself bowing to a remarkably pretty young lady.

"You wish to see me on some urgent matter, I understand?" asked Draycott, when they were both seated. "We are, of course, strangers and I am wondering——"

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"Oh yes, I know you must be!" She spoke with some confusion, which seemed to add to her beauty. "I know it must seem—very—rude of me to disturb you, but I thought you could help me to cure someone."

She was very timid, but the professor rather liked that; he had never given much thought to the opposite sex, except to think that some of its members were very bold and forward, and this pretty face, rendered more bewitching by the shyness of its owner, was causing him to experience quite a new feeling.

"To cure somebody?" enquired Draycott, overcoming the tendency to forget science. "I shall be glad to assist you if it lies in my power. Let me know exactly what you mean."

The young lady explained in a somewhat hesitating manner as though she was still afraid that the great man might resent the intrusion, that her mother had been suffering for some time from ill-defined pains which it had been impossible up to the present to dissipate; that during the past week her sufferings had increased considerably and the medical man who attended her had been unable to alleviate them. The young lady had been present at the lecture on the preceding evening, and had heard the professor's remarks about the power of hypnotism being latent in everyone. This had suggested to her that she might be able to do something for her mother, if she could obtain information concerning the methods to be employed. How was she to go to work in order to exercise the power which, according to Draycott, she possessed? Once more she reminded the hypnotist of his remarks on that point, and concluded with a timid observation that perhaps he was not quite sure that everyone had the power.

Draycott felt just a little bit nettled at the idea of any doubt being cast upon his statement; he was also strangely stirred by the apparent timidity and the beauty of the young woman who sat facing him; and he was anxious both to prove that he was correct, and to do something to relieve the mother from pain. By helping the mother he would be doing a service to the young lady also, a thought which increased the peculiar feeling which he was experiencing.

"I am quite sure," he observed gently, yet firmly, "that you possess the power to a greater degree than many other persons. Your eyes shine with much brilliancy, and although you are somewhat timid at times, it is my belief that you are gifted with considerable will-power."

Unconscious'y, for the professor was not quite aware of what he was saying, he had spoken the truth; a close observation of the young woman's eyes revealed great strength of character. "This is how you proceed."

Draycott drew his chair a little nearer to hers, looked at her fixedly and began to make passes with his hand.

"You fix your eyes full upon those of the person whom you intend to hypnotise," he continued. "Then you make a few movements with your hands, just as I am doing, in order to confuse them. It is strange how effective these few movements are upon the minds of the ordinary individual. And the combined action upon the mind of these movements and the glare of the eye is remarkable, even in the case of a person who may claim to be fairly strong-minded. Only when a person deliberately makes up his mind that he will not be mesmerised is the action of these two methods rendered null; on the other hand, if the patient is willing or is unconscious of what is about to be done, the result is certain."

"Oh, thank you so much!" said Miss Callan in a tone that was full of gratitude. "I feel sure that I shall be able to send my mother off. Your lucid explanation has quite cleared away the doubts I entertained. Now let me see. Had I not better go through the movements here, so that you can see whether I do them correctly? But perhaps I am taking up too much of your time. Oh dear! I have been here quite a long time already and I am afraid that I have been very rude in thus bothering you."

"Not at all!" Draycott hastened to assure her, and he did it with a warmth that would have surprised all his scientific friends. His face was animated, though there was a slight flush on his cheeks and in appearance he was very different from the cool, studious-looking man of science who posed as the apostle of hypnotism. "This has been a very pleasant experience for me—very pleasant indeed! and I am charmed to have the opportunity of propagating the science and conferring immediate benefit upon a human being at the same time. By all means make the experiment and I will correct you if you are wrong."

Draycott shifted his chair still a little nearer to Miss Callan and lay back with an air of great contentment, as though he were a patient willing to be operated upon. This was decidedly a pleasant experience, he had never gone through anything like this before, and he caught himself wondering dreamily whether a bachelor's life was really the blessed condition which he had hitherto imagined it. Just imagine what it must be to have a partner for life similar to the girl who was now gazing at him with those glorious eyes! How pretty she looked! And how deftly she moved those dainty little hands in front of his face! He felt half tempted to grasp them and ask her to be his wife. That would have been rather sudden, but Draycott believed in quick decisions.

He tried to tell her that she was performing her task splendidly, but the words would not come; his eyes were kept fixed by the glare of hers—yes, it was really a glare. In a dazed manner he recognised that she was exercising the mesmeric influence over him and he felt pleased; he would tell her afterwards how the gleam from her eyes had fascinated him, how the pretty face with its slightly flushed cheeks had enchanted him, how splendidly she had understood what he had explained to her about the movements and all the rest of it.

"Now," said Miss Dora Callan, two minutes later, "I think we can proceed to business. How much money did you get out of your lectures?"

"Just over £100," replied the hypnotised Professor.

"Ah! I thought it would have been a little more than that," continued Miss Callan, "and where is that money?"

"The notes are in my pocket-book, but the gold and silver are in my bag," came from the lips of Draycott.

"It was rather a foolish arrangement about the manner of payment," resumed Miss Callan pleasantly. "It got into the papers you see, and it made people say that if you were so devoted to science, you ought not to have worried about such trifles as fees. Kindly give me your pocket-book."

Draycott did as he was bid, and Miss Callan quietly extracted the notes and handed the pocket-book back to its owner.

"Now I will trouble you to go up-stairs and fetch your bag. It would not be quite the proper thing, or I would prefer to accompany you or even to get the bag myself. But you had better bring it down into this cosy

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little reception room which, fortunately, we have entirely to ourselves."

Professor Draycott left the room without the least show of resistance and returned in due course with his bag. Miss Callan quietly locked the door on the inside, and then requested the professor to find the money and hand it to her. The hypnotised man did as he was told.

"Thank you." Miss Callan smiled pleasantly as she took five sovereigns from the bag containing the gold and let them fall among the professor's papers and clothing in his travelling bag.

"You will want some money for your journey. I understand that you leave by the 5.30 train this afternoon?"

Draycott nodded assent.

"Very well. I will write a short note which will explain to you what has happened, otherwise you may be inclined to blame the hotel authorities for the loss of your money when you wake up."

She took up a pen and wrote a few lines rapidly on one of the sheets of paper that lay on the table. When she had finished she sealed it in an envelope and addressed it to Professor Draycott.

"Take this and go back to your room, where you are to remain in this condition until five o'clock. You will just have time to catch your train, and I shall be out of your reach."

With a smile of intense satisfaction and a pretty bow, Miss Callan turned her back on Draycott, unlocked the door and walked out.

When Professor Draycott came to his senses at five o'clock, he gazed in bewilderment at the envelope which he still held. Rising from his chair he looked about him in an endeavour to explain to himself how it was that he felt so confused.

"I must have been asleep," he murmured. "How did this letter come here and who brought it?"

The simplest way to solve the mystery was to open the letter, and, as a man of science Draycott recognised the fact. He cut the envelope and began to read.

The note told him what had happened on that eventful afternoon, and it further explained that the writer, being sadly in want of money, had hit upon the bold idea of hypnotising the professor himself and relieving him of the proceeds of his lectures.

Fortune and a pretty face had enabled her to carry out her plan successfully.

"You ought to be greatly pleased," the writer concluded, "at this proof of the accuracy of your views, and at having so apt a pupil. I do not know whether we shall ever meet again, probably not; but neither of us is likely to forget the experience of this afternoon. It was pleasant to me, and I am convinced that you found it equally agreeable—at least, at the beginning."

Draycott examined his pocket-book and then his bag. It was perfectly true, he had been robbed by a pretty and daring female thief; he was too much a scientist to spend useless time in giving vent to his vexation and indignation; he was convinced that he had been hypnotised by the young woman who had called upon him, and that the hotel people were not to blame for any act of dishonesty on the part of an employée. Then he suddenly remembered his train.

The thoughts of the learned man were not agreeable ones as he travelled towards the town where he was to stay the night, and from which he would take an early morning train to Malton, but it is impossible to conjecture what they would have been had he known that Miss Callan, much disguised, was a passenger in the same train. When he alighted at his destination, he lingered on the platform and watched the train as it left the station to continue its journey. He was just turning away as the last coach passed him, when a woman's voice uttered the words: "Good night, Professor Draycott."

He started and stared. The voice was familiar and the mocking tone was significant. Then it came to him—it was his afternoon visitor.

The train was gone. He might have made an attempt to catch her, but he really had very little positive proof to convince a judge and jury that she had taken the money, and just think of the ridicule that would be heaped upon him for having allowed himself to be caught in that way.

Professor Draycott's friends have remarked that he has ceased to allude in his lectures to a fact which he formerly emphasised, namely, that every human being possesses the power of hypnotism.

G. Day.

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SILKY OF THE GUARDS.

On the regimental muster roll his name was inscribed as Second Lieutenant the Honourable Eustace Borrowdale. To his brother officers, he was known by the less portentous appellation of "Silky"; while Society—by whom he was much in request, both because of his acres and his inches—affixed the distinguishing title of —"of the Guards."

From what source the nickname had sprung, was never made quite clear. Possibly it arose from his behaviour on the occasion of a visit to the "International Sporting," when Miles Dogherty—the Limerick heavy-weight—knocked out Sam P. Simpson—the Bowery champion—after a fight lasting through ten rounds, with much damage to the Transatlantic worthy's visage—"tapping his claret," and "bringing up his peepers," in a manner worthy of the best traditions of the "noble art."

Instead of going into ecstasies over the capacity of the one to endure punishment, and the science displayed by the other, "Silky" was heard to remark, that it was a beastly exhibition, "by Jove!" and he was proceeding to express his regrets, that he had allowed himself to be inveigled—into witnessing such a display of pure savagery, when a deadly pallor crept over his face, bringing his remarks to an abrupt termination, and himself to the ground in a dead faint.

Conduct such as this could not—in the eyes of the half-dozen veterans of the regiment who accompanied him—be anything else but chicken-heartedness—absolutely appalling in a chap who had chosen the service for a vocation.

To these seasoned warriors, who had seen men's blood flow like water amid the iron hail and clashing steel of many a hard-fought field, the lad's nausea at the sight of a prize-fighter's face reduced to the appearance of pulpy liver, was incomprehensible.

What wonder, then, that old Brodrick, the senior major, who considered such conduct little short of a disgrace to the regiment, growled out: "The boy will do no good in the service. He's as soft as silk."

It is very probable that the cognomen originated thus, for the story of the lieutenant's squeamishness afforded amusement at the mess-table for many a night to come. On the other hand, the young fellow's feminine voice and shy, nervous manner—he was barely twenty-two—might have had something to do with it.

While yet again, the small head, with its close-cropped, but still curling ringlets of silky golden hair, the blue eyes, the smooth, fair skin, delicate as a woman's—all so absurdly out of place, set, as they were, on a pair of shoulders, and stalwart form of a very Hercules—might have been responsible. Whether "Silky" had his own ideas upon the subject was never known. Certainly, at first, when so addressed, his cheek would flush hotly, and an expression of annoyance creep into his eyes, but gradually as time passed, he appeared to become indifferent.

Yet he was anything but effeminate in his habits. He had shot big game in Africa, stalked deer in the raw of the morning in Scottish Highlands, and in the hunting-field—heavy weight as he was—had invariably been found in the first flight—he, and his big bay—Roger—taking fences and stone walls in a manner worthy of Galway itself.

And no one among the subalterns had passed more rapidly through the hands of the drill sergeant than he; while the true cavalry man's seat in the saddle seemed to come to him by instinct. As a swordsman, too, the regiment were bound to admit that "Silky." would be bad to beat.

When the cloud—as yet no bigger than a man's hand, yet, to the far seeing, charged with the very thunderbolts of Jove—loomed over the Transvaal, and rumours of the probability, in the event of hostilities, of certain of the Household troops being called into requisition leaked out, there were many among the officers who whispered that the great Borrowdale interest would be put into motion to transfer "Silky," into a home-staying battalion.

Yet the cloud grew larger, spreading over the Free State, and casting a black shadow across the whole of South Africa, and still "Silky's" seat at the regimental mess-table remained filled.

So, too, during the phases which followed, from the issuing of the insolent ultimatums, to the calling out of the reserves, and the momentous day, when, as part of the composite regiment, he, and others of his brigade, received orders to prepare for active service.

Indeed that night, when toasts were drunk in honour of the brave soldiers holding the forts in far-off Natal, at Mafeking, at Kimberley and Rhodesia, there were none who drank deeper than "Silky," or whose eyes sparkled more brightly, or showed greater apparent gratification at the prospect of taking his share in the defence of the Empire.

Only when the moment of embarkation came, and he had said "good-bye" to a grey-haired lady, who had called him again and again "her darling boy," and besought him to run no unnecessary risks, for her sake —"for her sake"—did "Silky" betray emotion. Then indeed he broke down.

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As the tender moved off, indifferent to the thousand eyes upon him, he leant—white and trembling—against the bulwarks, watching the bowed figure on the receding dock, while the tears streamed in a very torrent down his cheeks.

There were many white, drawn faces round him, as they looked on what perhaps might be their last, on those who were nearest and dearest to them—yet none so broken-hearted as "Silky."

Old Brodrick, with the remembrance of their visit to the "International Sporting," still in his mind, and whose breast was as impervious to emotion as his cuirass, could not resist expressing himself upon the subject to the Colonel standing at his side.

"That lad will want watching," he observed. "Ten to one he'll get scared, and show the white feather the first time we get under fire."

"The old man"—as his soldiers called him—looked hard at the lad. Then, tugging nervously at his grey moustache, and with a suspicious mist creeping over his keen, grey eyes, he replied shortly:

"I don't agree with you. That boy is not ashamed to show natural grief, and I take that as a good sign. To me, that requires more courage, in a place like this, than to ride on a park of artillery. I know that kind of lad. They shake and tremble at the start of the action, but when they warm to the work, they are capable of deeds that old soldiers, such as you or I, Brodrick, would shrink from. Remember your own youth, Major; you've been a soldier so long that you appear to have forgotten what it is to be a man."

The white cliffs of Albion grew faint in the distance.

The Major accepted this rebuke in silence, only shaking his head doubtfully as he turned away.

So the great transport sailed, and the white cliffs of Albion grew faint in the distance, then faded away.

Day and night, under the impulse of the great revolving screws, the heavily-laden trooper ploughed her way toward the war-torn continent.

The heights of Table Mountain loomed large on the horizon. Troops and stores were landed, then, once more, the troopship—carrying details for Natal, of which "Silky's" troop was one—steamed out of the bay and made for Durban.

Then the rush commenced. Men and horses, guns and ammunition were hurriedly entrained and sent to the front. A few busy days, when hours seemed but as seconds, passed.

The eve of a great battle arrived, and then morning dawned; the moment was at hand when "Silky" was to give proof as to whether his Major's fears or his Colonel's confidence would be justified.

Yes! The time had come!

For hours the field artillery had plied their guns upon the rugged kopje behind the shelter of which the Boer force was entrenched, every boulder covering a marksman, every hillock disclosing a rifle barrel.

The enemy's guns had been silenced, and under cover of the confusion and dismay, caused by our well-planted shells, the infantry had advanced to the assault.

Undaunted by the storm of bullets which fell round them like hail, unchecked by the constant dropping of men, they had crept up and up.

A fierce hurrah as the summit was gained; loud cries of vengeance; shrieks for mercy; wild oaths; the whip-like cracking of the officers' service revolvers; then the cold chink, chink, as the British bayonets swept aside the feeble parry of the clubbed Mausers, and bit deep in the Dutchmen's flesh.

Afterwards the wild cheer of triumph, as the enemy lost heart, and taking to their horses, streamed over the veld, scattered like deer, by the resistless onslaught of the despised "Rooi-batjes."

Yes, the time had certainly come!

To make the rout complete, the cavalry must pursue the retreating commandoes, and, if possible, take their guns.

Instinctively each man gripped his sabre hard, and gathering up his reins, settled himself firmly in the saddle—drawing a long breath, as if he thought it might be his last.

The officers glanced at their men—forgetting in their anxiety for them, to look at each other. Though, had they done so, they would have learnt nothing, for each and all were deadly pale—some from intense excitement—others from a swift reflection of home, and dear ones, from whom they were going, perhaps, to be cut off for ever.

It was fortunate for "Silky" that his brother officers were so engaged, for the feeling of deadly fear, which had come over him at the commencement of the action, when he received his "baptism of fire," had now increased tenfold. His hand trembled so, that but for the swordknot at his wrist, the weapon would have fallen to the ground.

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His knees had lost all grip upon the saddle, and only by the instinct of balance, given by long practice, did he keep his seat. His face was livid.

"Good heavens!" he thought. "I am a coward!"

To the young fellow, scion of a race of warriors, whose names were written large in the glorious page of England's dead heroes, the thought was torture.

Yet deny it he could not. He did not, he felt, so much fear death, although, so far he had found life very sweet, still the feeling of indefinable terror was each moment increasing.

"Close up! Trot! Gallop!"

For a space, the voice of his Colonel ringing out like a trumpet, the jingle of accoutrements, the bounding gallop of his horse, the wild shouts of the men, at whose flank he rode, the necessity of keeping his eyes fixed on his commander, who, a horse length ahead of his men, by the repeated sweep of his sword arm, indicated an increase of speed, made him oblivious to all, and he rode as one in a dream.

A riderless horse dashed past him.

But as the heavy forms, and unkempt, rugged faces of the enemy, who had turned sullenly at bay with their machine guns and Mausers raining death upon them, came into view, and the wild trumpet sounded the charge, the feeling of sickening dread overtook him once more.

The regiment had extended its formation. Now the men, deploying right and left, each fixed in his mind's eye his adversary, and rode down upon him at the full speed of his charger.

"Silky" was alone in their midst, forgotten! Involuntarily checking his horse, he glared round him, searching for a means of escape.

Spat! A sound such as might have been made by a stick striking a wet cloth; the gallant horse which had carried him so nobly, staggered beneath him, plunged madly forward in a last desperate effort to overtake his stable companion—now a dozen lengths ahead—then fell prone to the earth, hurling him from the saddle, far out upon the veld.

"Was he hurt?" he asked himself. "No!"

Then fortune had favoured him!

Where he lay, a slight rising in the almost dead level of the veld, sheltered him from the rifle fire. He was in comparative safety. Luckily, too, he had struck against a pebble or something in his fall, which had raised a lump upon his forehead. He decided to remain where he was, assuming insensibility. Should the charge—as was practically certain—prove successful, he would be picked up by the bearer corps, who would suspect nothing. If, on the other hand, as had frequently happened before, the Boers had retreated merely to lead the cavalry into an ambuscade, he would be taken prisoner. Under the circumstances, he would prefer the latter. He would be safe there!

Imprisonment at Pretoria was not a pleasant prospect, but was better, after all, than the dangers of the campaign. So he reasoned, while the sound of whistling shots—the whir-r-r of the machine guns—and the shouts and yells of the combatants, died away in the distance.

Then came the re-action, the contemplation of his own cowardice.

Through his closed eyes, he seemed to see the figures of his dead ancestors, contemplating him with scornful looks—even the gentle face of his mother, who had begged him to be careful for her sake, appeared to be looking at him reproachfully.

He thought of his brother officers—those gallant fellows with whom he had spent so many happy hours—of his grey-haired Colonel, now far ahead; all fighting for their lives, while he, who should have been at their sides, was lying there in safety, and lastly, came the thought of his soldier's oath—of his duty to his Queen and country.

It was agony! He would have given empires to retrieve his act. But the die was cast—there was no joining them now!

Stay! What was this?

A sound of galloping hoofs—of ringing scabbards—a trooper of his regiment galloped past him—his head bare and bleeding from a ghastly wound in the neck, and his face white with fear.

Another followed—then three riding abreast—half a dozen—twenty! What was this? A retreat?

Borne on the moaning wind, which was springing up, he heard the words: "A trap! Every officer down!"

He saw it all like a flash. The Boers, acting on their usual tactics, had fallen back on a strong force held in reserve. The officers of the regiment had been picked off, and the men, leaderless, had been seized with panic.

A burning desire, not only to retrieve his own self-respect, but his regiment's prestige, a fierce yearning to avenge the deaths of his brave comrades, sprang up in his breast.

The warrior spirit of his race, the indomitable repugnance of the Englishman to acknowledge defeat, awoke, and he leapt to his feet.

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A riderless horse just then was dashing past him.

To seize its trailing rein, and leap into the saddle, was, to the guardsman, the work of a minute. With a torrent of wild shouts, and, in his excitement, fierce oaths, to gather his terror-stricken men round him, was the work of another; then regaining courage from their young leader, they dashed down anew upon the foe.

There was no resisting their mad onslaught. A few moments of hard work, and they were through, only to reform, and charge again. Singling out the leader, a man of note among them, "Silky" slew him with his own hand. Then with helmet off, and his golden ringlets blowing hither and thither in the breeze—wounded in a dozen places, yet feeling none—he hacked and hewed his way among them, like a very demi-god of war.

Like the white plume of Henri of Navarre his golden head was to his men, a very oriflame, and soon, shouting that the British rooineks were devils, not men, the stubborn Boers—those there were left of them—melted over the darkening veld like dew before the morning sun.

To pursue the remnant into the now rapidly falling darkness, was, as "Silky" realised, but to court disaster, and re-forming his men, he turned to ride back to the camp.

As he picked his way through the dead and dying, lying in every imaginable posture round him, a familiar form caught his eye, and he leapt from the saddle, and placed his hand upon the wounded man's heart. At the touch, the keen, grey eyes opened, regarding him in a dazed, wondering way, and the Colonel—for it was he—sat up and looked about him.

"Where am I? What has happened?" he asked.

"Silky" stood silent; his face flushing painfully, his eyes fixed upon the ground.

Before the eyes of his chief, the remembrance of his former act filled him with shame.

The old man placed his hand to his forehead, from which the blood was oozing, and continued brokenly:

"I remember, but,"—with a puzzled look—"where did you get to? Someone said they saw you shot down as we got to close quarters."

Still silence from "Silky," who felt ashamed to speak.

But from a trooper, who had drawn near to aid his officer: "The Lieutenant was knocked over, sir, at the first rush. I saw him and his horse go down myself, and see," calling attention to "Silky," now reeling from the loss of blood, "he's been hit more than once. But," with intense admiration—"he's a plucked one, he is, sir, and no mistake, though we did think him soft. When you and the other officers went down, sir, we got badly scared, and I'm ashamed to say it, but it's true, sir, we bolted. But for Lieutenant 'Silky,' sir," in his excitement, the worthy private used the familiar name, "it would have been a bad day for the 1st Life. We'd a never dared hold up our 'eads in Pall Mall again, sir. But he rallied us like a man, and," modestly contenting himself with a sweeping gesture, at the bloodstained ground round them. "Well, you see the result, sir. They won't call us carpet soldiers no more in London, I reckon!"

"You saved the honour of the regiment."

The Colonel, whose wound was fortunately superficial, staggered to his feet, and grasped the young officer's hand.

"My dear fellow!" he said. "You have saved the honour of the regiment, but it was only what I expected, though there were those amongst us, who, alas! have fought their last fight, who said you would show the white feather in the fight."

The young fellow could contain himself no longer, and blurted out the truth.

"So you see, sir, they were right after all," he concluded brokenly.

"I'm hanged if they were!" growled a voice, as its owner, limping painfully, and with a deep sword cut over the head, which made him almost unrecognisable, extricated himself from under a dead charger, close at hand.

"A chap, who has the courage to make a confession like that, is no coward. I was wrong, and you right. Colonel, see that he gets the Cross."

"*Captain* Borrowdale shall have it, Major!" was the reply.

And he did!

Hubert Bartlett.

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From the Snare of the Fowler.

THE great ocean steamship, homeward bound, was shearing her way through the waves at the rate of twenty odd miles an hour, and her passengers, scattered up and down the deck, were making the most of the evening light before the dinner bell should summon them below. Two young men, cigarette in mouth, were watching another couple, a man and a woman, who stood leaning over the rail of the ship at a little distance. The man was gazing with an expression of rapt admiration into his companion's eyes—very fine eyes they were, too, of a deep sea blue, and well worthy of all the admiration that Reginald Oldroyd had in his power to offer.

It was evident that a conversation of more than usual importance was being carried on between the two, for the lady hastily turned away her face, gazing silently over the broad Atlantic, whenever any one strolled that way.

"Did you ever see such a young idiot?" said one of the smokers, indicating with the lift of an eyebrow the young couple at the rail.

"Don't know, I'm sure. Seems to be enjoying himself," said the other, flicking the ash off his cigarette.

"I knew Reggie at school, and even at that age one could see that he was just the sort of fellow to make a fool of himself over a woman."

"Oh, my prophetic soul!"

"He thinks that he is a man of the world, and he is as easily taken in as a child. I bet you he has swallowed every word that woman has crammed him with, and if he is not delivered in some miraculous manner, ten to one he will end by marrying her."

"And why not?"

"He will find himself in Queer Street if he does. Old Simon Oldroyd, his uncle, would cut him off with sixpence if he were to bring Mrs. Vavasour to Oldroyd Hall, and the poor fellow has nothing to fall back upon. Besides, the woman is really impossible. She is a *divorcée*, and I daresay she is coming to Europe with no other object than to cover up her past and provide for her future by marrying some rich young cub with more muscles than brains, and more money than muscles."

"Why don't you say all this to the man most interested?"

"So I will, after dinner to-night."

"Do you mean to do that?"

"I must. I could never face Reggie's mother again, if I were to see the poor fellow blundering on to his fate without interposing a word to save him."

If the speaker had at that moment been looking at his friend, he would have seen something like a suppressed smile hovering about the corners of his mouth. But Herbert Merivale was one of those happy people who have unlimited faith in the efficacy of their own sermons, and he seized the next opportunity of opening his mind to his friend.

Oldroyd was a giant of a fellow, tall and broad, with close-cropped yellow hair, and a fat good-natured smile. His smile vanished, however, as soon as the subject of his friend's address became clear to him. A frown that looked almost like the scowl of a petulant schoolboy, gathered upon his face. He listened in silence for some time, but at length he growled out:

"Drop it, Merivale!" in a tone there was no mistaking. "I know all you can tell me about that. I know that the facts have been grossly misrepresented. I have it on the best authority. Mrs. Vavasour's husband behaved like a blackguard. She is well rid of such a brute, and I am perfectly convinced—in fact, I may say I know—that from first to last in that wretched business Jul——I mean, Mrs. Vavasour, was not in the least to blame. And remember this, old man, if you and I are to remain friends, you must never breathe another word against the good name of that lady. Heavens, man! is the voice of slander to be taken for the sentence of a judge? Is it enough to accuse a woman for her to be deemed guilty? Is that your idea of justice? Merivale, I am ashamed of you!"

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"You quite mistake me, my dear fellow," said Merivale placidly. "I brought no accusation against the lady. I merely mentioned some facts which are common knowledge, having been proved before the Divorce Court of Dacotah——"

"They divorce people for absolutely nothing in those regions!" interrupted Reggie.

"I dare say. I was merely asking you to look at the matter from a practical point of view. What will your uncle say to a marriage of this kind?"

A sensation as of a stream of ice-cold water ran down the young man's spinal column as those words entered his ears. Here was the fell shadow that had been haunting the chambers of his mind ever since he had first known that he was madly in love with Julia Vavasour. But Reggie did not care to discuss these matters even with an old friend like Merivale.

"I have no doubt that when my uncle knows Mrs. Vavasour he will admire her as much as I do," he said firmly. "But at any rate, would you not advise me to turn my back upon a woman just when she most needs the hand of—of a friend? That is not your idea of chivalry, is it, Merivale?"

"Reggie, you don't mean to say that you are such an idiot that you have gone and got engaged to that woman?" burst out Merivale.

Oldroyd withdrew his arm from that of his friend, and turning round confronted him in the moonlight. Merivale saw that his face was very pale.

"I must ask you not to speak in that way of the lady again," he said. "Mrs. Vavasour, who is in every possible way my superior, has at last consented to be my wife. I had not intended to mention the fact as yet, and I trust that you will regard this as said in confidence, but the fact is so, and—and won't you wish me joy, old man?" he concluded, his voice changing all of a sudden.

"I wish I could, but I can't —not in the way you mean," said his friend, and there the unsatisfactory conversation came to an end.

Of course the engaged couple were continually together, and the secret of their betrothal was a very open one indeed. They provided a gratis entertainment for the rest of the passengers, without being in the smallest degree conscious of the fact—at least, if the lady knew it, she concealed her knowledge admirably.

"I must go to Oldroyd Hall first, and prepare my uncle for the good news," said the enamoured Reginald as they parted at Liverpool, "I am sure it won't be long before you get an invitation to the Hall. If you aren't asked I won't go there again, let my mother say what she likes," added the young man with an air of defiance.

"Hush, my own! How can your uncle, or your mother (who, I am certain is the sweetest old lady in existence), like me till they have seen me? Don't be ridiculous, you foolish boy!"

"Do you know, Julie, I know it is very sweet and affectionate of you, and all that, but I would rather you didn't call me that quite so often. It makes a man feel ridiculous."

"My darling, as if there were a name on earth good enough and dear enough for you!"

Reginald would have kissed her on the spot, but there was no opportunity for an embrace, and he had to content himself with looking unutterable things.

Mrs. Vavasour was bent on seeing the Lake country, and Reggie insisted on staying behind to see her off to Penrith, while Merivale took the express to town, carrying the news with him.

* * * * *

A week went by, and seven honey-sweet love-letters had passed between the lovers. There was a great deal of affection but very little information in Reggie's epistles. The lady gathered, however, that the dreaded uncle had been informed of the fact of the engagement; but no invitation to Oldroyd Hall was forthcoming.

One afternoon as Mrs. Vavasour was reclining on the top of her bed—a luxury she was fond of enjoying after lunch—a knock came to her door. She jumped up and opened it, and there stood a waiter with a card on a salver. She snatched it up, and the colour rushed into her face as she read—Major Oldroyd—Horse Guards Club, Pall Mall, S.W.

She slipped half-a-crown into the man's hand.

"Take the gentleman into the little drawing-room, and try to manage so that we shan't be disturbed," she said to him with a smile.

She knew that male servants were always her slaves —with servants of her own sex it was otherwise—and she had little fear that the interview, on which so much was to depend, would be interrupted. For a moment Mrs. Vavasour stood before the mirror, and as she touched up her stray curls she looked into her own eyes and smiled. She thought that she would be equal to the subduing of Major Oldroyd. Certainly she was a remarkably pretty woman, with a delicate, pale complexion, dark silky hair, and the loveliest blue eyes in the world. Her nose, with its dainty tilt at the end, her cheeks, and her chin, were all bewitching. With a satisfied sigh she turned away from the mirror and went down to the little drawing-room.

A tall man with a military carriage stood at the further end of the room. He bowed stiffly as the lady entered, and then stood upright, as though he had been on parade.

"My nephew tells me he is engaged to you," began the Major abruptly, scarcely waiting till Mrs. Vavasour had seated herself. "I thought I might as well run down and tell you how things stand. It would be a cruel kindness to lead you to suppose that the marriage can ever take place. The fact is, my nephew has not a penny of his own in the world, and for him to get engaged was a piece of childish folly. I trust, madam, that you will look at the matter in a sensible light. You can't——"

"Sir, you are—you are too cruel!" murmured the lady, and she proceeded to cry in the most charming manner possible. The Major, frowning and uncomfortable, strutted up and down at the other end of the room, casting now and then sheep's eyes at the weeping figure on the sofa.

"My dear lady, don't—pray don't cry like this," he said, at last. "My nephew is a very decent young fellow, but, upon my word, you know, he isn't worth it."

At this the lady fired up.

"Do you suppose, sir," she exclaimed, "that a woman cannot be influenced by any but mercenary motives? Do you suppose I accepted your nephew for what he had to give me?"

"Certainly not, my dear madam. And the proof of it is that he has nothing in the world to give. But why should we not be friends, though we have a difference of opinion? Reginald, you know, is little more than a boy."

It was awkwardly expressed, but Mrs. Vavasour caught the Major's meaning, and smiled faintly.

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"He is certainly very young," she murmured, "perhaps by-and-bye you will not refuse your consent to our engagement."

"No, madam, don't ask me to do that!" said Major Oldroyd; but the tone in which this was said was not by any means so austere as the words, and the lady blushed a little as she met the Major's eye.

The waiter had done his best, but he could not keep the other guests out of the room more than a few minutes. One or two ladies came in, and Major Oldroyd and Mrs. Vavasour affected to be engaged in an ordinary conversation, which they kept up for some time. They met at dinner, and after dinner they strolled side by side by the margin of the lake, and the subject of Reginald and his matrimonial hopes was not once mentioned between them.

The next day, and the next, the Major continued to be a guest at the hotel, and Mrs. Vavasour came to the conclusion that he was as much in love with her as ever his nephew had been. It was scarcely wonderful if the thought occurred to her—Why throw away the substance for the shadow? Why hang on to the nephew, and marry a man who might turn out a pauper, when she might become at one stroke the lady of Oldroyd Hall and the adjoining territory? Would it not be better, on the whole, to be Reginald's aunt than his wife?

As the uncle's attentions became more marked this view of the matter appealed more and more strongly to the practical nature of Mrs. Vavasour; and when one afternoon she made a final appeal to the Major not to withhold his consent any longer, and he answered with a look full of meaning: "If I found it hard to do that at first, it is impossible now," the lady made up her mind.

She wrote to Reginald by that night's post, and told him that she feared they had made a mistake. Not that she was not willing to wait for him any number of years, but she saw no prospect of their ever being married. His uncle was quite obdurate, quite impervious to every argument she could think of; and as they had neither of them any money, it was surely better to recognise the stern facts of the case. "Besides, my dear boy," she went on, "you know I am older, ever so much older than you are, and I have thought sometimes that I did you a cruel kindness when I consented to be yours. In a few years I shall be quite, quite an old woman, and then you will be glad that I found the strength to give you up. Do not try to see me, for my decision is quite irrevocable. Though it should break my heart, I must never see you again."

Mrs. Vavasour told the Major, not without tears, what she had done, and he highly commended her action. He told her at the same time that if he knew anything of his nephew he would be at the hotel on the following afternoon, and he thought perhaps it would be better if he went home for a day. To this Mrs. Vavasour gladly agreed, for she had forseen that it might be awkward if the uncle and nephew were to meet at the hotel. The Major departed, after taking a tender farewell of the all-subduing Julia, and Reggie arrived. Mrs. Vavasour shut herself up in her room, and it was only after the passing of many notes, impassioned on the one side, despairing on the other, that she consented to see him. He implored, raved, stormed, and all but cursed her. It was all to no purpose. The soft little darling was as hard as adamant in her resolve to do nothing to spoil the life of one to whom she owed so many happy hours. He went away at last, half mad with kicking against the iron barriers that stood between him and his desire. Three days after his return to London he sailed for Japan.

The Major saw him off, and on returning to the habitable parts of London he took a hansom and drove to a certain square, in which dwelt Mrs. Oldroyd, Reginald's mother.

The Major was admitted at once, and found his sister-in-law still tearful, and inclined to think that perhaps they had carried their plot a little too far.

"Not a bit of it," said the Major stoutly. "He'll thank us on his knees for this, before he is as old as I am."

"I had almost forgotten," said the widow, with a little blush, and she unlocked her desk and took out a little parcel, which she handed to her brother-in-law.

"If it is quite convenient," said the Major.

"Oh, quite—quite."

The Major put the little packet in his pocket, and flushed slightly as he did so.

"But don't you think—the lady—" began the widow, nervously.

"Not a bit of it!" exclaimed the Major. "By Jove, Marion, she's a splendid creature, and though of course it would never do for Reggie, I would marry her myself to-morrow if she'd have me. And that reminds me—I'd better enlighten her."

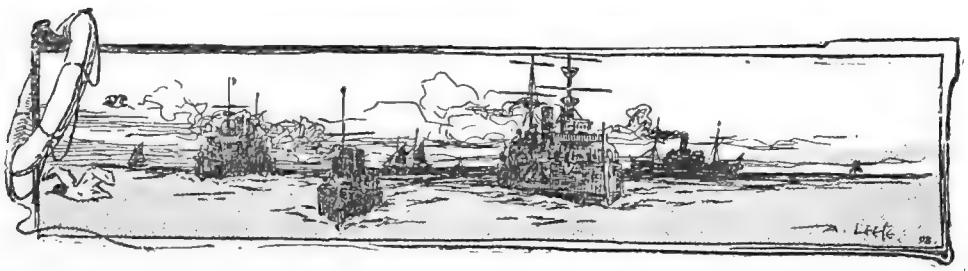
He took a pen and a sheet of paper, and wrote as follows:—

My dear Mrs. Vavasour,—

You mentioned one day that you would like to see Oldroyd Hall, the seat of our family. As my brother, Simon, who owns the place, is from home now, it will give my sister-in-law, Mrs. Oldroyd, and myself much pleasure to escort you down there and do the honours. My brother never receives strangers, or I am sure he would be delighted to meet you. He is quite a recluse, with very strict notions on a great many subjects, not a wandering ne'er-do-well like me.—Pray wire me to the Junior Army and Navy Club as to what day I may expect you in town, and believe me, dear Mrs. Vavasour,

Yours very truly,
Brian Oldroyd.

John K. Leys.



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Briton or Boer?

By GEORGE GRIFFITH.

INTRODUCTION.

For years past Britain and the Transvaal have been spoiling for a fight, and it was left to that well-known author, Mr. George Griffith, to write this strong and exciting serial nearly four years ago graphically describing a huge war between the two countries.

The story, coming so soon after the Jameson Raid, was read with unusual interest.

Now that Briton and Boer are in deadly conflict it will be interesting to read the story, and see how far the imagination of the author has actually come true.

SUMMARY OF OPENING CHAPTERS.

Chapter I.—The scene opens on the Rand. It is the eve of Amajuba day, and a State ball is being given. To this comes Prince Paul Regna, a Polish nobleman, and his daughter, Princess Vavara. They are introduced to Dr. Leyds.

Chapter II.—Dr. Leyds returns to Pretoria to attend a midnight consultation at the Government buildings. The Prince's rooms are in the Grand Hotel opposite. By tapping the wires, which cross the street at this point, the Prince and his daughter overhear all that goes on, and telegraph the result by secret code to Europe.

Chapters III. and IV.—Amajuba day dawns. The Secretary accompanies the Prince and Princess to Krugersdorp, where, from the base of the Monument of Independence, the President makes a great proclamation. The Convention of London is abrogated, the absolute independence of the South African Republic is declared; the President unfurls a Union Jack and rends it to pieces. So the storm bursts!

Chapters V. and VI.—On the following day Major-General Carrington learns at Buluwayo that all the wires have been cut between Rhodesia and the south and east. He concludes that this is due to Boer hostility, and prepares to meet it. Meanwhile a powerful British squadron appears unexpectedly in Delagoa Bay, and Lieutenant Ferris is sent ashore to take possession of the telegraph station.

Chapters VII. and VIII.—A Russian squadron is in the Bay at the same time. The flagship *Navarin* fires on the British destroyer *Thrasher*. Admiral Dale takes this as an act of war. There is a battle and the Russian squadron is defeated and captured. Michael Ostroff seeks to escape in the *Sokol*. He is taken prisoner, and important dispatches are found in his possession. Admiral Dale calls a council of war.

Chapters IX. and X.—General Carrington's campaign in the Matoppo Hills ends in the defeat of the rebels, the remnant of whom take refuge in a kopje, which is surrounded. A Rhodesian trooper and a private of Lancers capture a Boer disguised as a Kaffir, and take him into camp.

CHAPTER XI.

Between Two Wars.

Before daybreak the next morning the whole camp was afoot and astir. The General gave orders for four columns of a hundred men each to ascend the kopje from four different sides, and clear it out with as little bloodshed as might be. Meanwhile the rest of the force was drawn up in positions round the base of the hill ready to ride or shoot down any who tried to break through or get away. Then he sent for the Boer whom Private Anson had captured the night before.

He came in between two guards, washed and dressed in the semi-civil, semi-military attire that had been got together for him. His right shoulder was bandaged and his right arm bound to his body, his face was a sallow brown, not by any means bad looking, though marred by the expression of shifty slyness so often seen in the eyes of his countrymen, and by a surly turn about the corners of his mouth.

Yet he faced the man who could, and who probably would, string him up with little ceremony and less compunction to a convenient bough of the nearest tree without flinching; for, though a Boer will often run away from danger when he sees a chance of saving his life, he is usually brave enough when his back is to the wall.

"Do you speak English?" the General asked curtly looking keenly into his eyes.

"Ja!" said the Boer, "but I will only speak as much as pleases me."

"Just so," said Sir Frederick drily. "We don't tie our prisoners up to a waggon wheel and shambok them till they do speak. Now, what's your name?"

"Piet Potgieter."

"Where do you come from?"

"Rustenburg."

"Ah, a Dopper! One of the President's own particular flock, eh? Does His Honour know that you are up here playing the Kaffir?"

The Boer grinned and shook his head.

"Your way of telling a lie without speaking, I suppose?" said the General pleasantly. "I always thought there was something behind the old man's offer to send a commando to help us against the niggers. How many of you are there up here?"

"Maybe you'll find that out when you clear the kopje."

"Very well; you're not making it any the better for them or yourself when I do. How long have you been up here teaching the Kaffirs to shoot?"

"About six months."

"I thought so—about so long as you've been stopping supplies. How many stands of arms and rounds of ammunition have you given them?"

"About as many as we took from Jameson's crowd at Vlakfontein," replied the Boer with another grin.

The General acknowledged the retort with a smile, not a very pleasant one for a man whose life was in his hands to look at, and went on with his examination.

"How did you get the rifles and ammunition up here?"

The Boer grinned again as he replied:

"In the transport waggons, of course. They were directed to people in Victoria and Salisbury in case they were found, and then the waggons got stuck in the drifts, and the Matabele came down and plundered them; that's all."

The General glanced round at his staff and growled:

"Nice sort of supervision they must have had on the frontier. Why you couldn't get a pea-shooter into the Transvaal without it being found."

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Then he turned to the prisoner and went on, speaking more sharply: "Now, Mr. Potgieter, I don't know how highly you value your neck, but I suppose you know that by all the rules of war you've said and done enough to hang you two or three times over. However, I am prepared to treat you as an ordinary prisoner of war on one condition, and that is that you tell me frankly and plainly whether or not the Transvaal has actually declared war against the Imperial Government, about how many of your people have crossed the frontier, and how far north they had got when you last heard of them."

"I don't know."

"That's a lie."

"Then I won't tell. Find out for yourself, *verdomde rooinek!* There are enough of them, and they're near enough to eat you and your fancy soldiers up before you're very much older. Now I suppose you can hang me, for that's all you can get."

Sir Frederick looked for a moment into the dogged, unflinching face of his prisoner, then he said with a pleasanter smile than before:

"You're an infernal liar, Mr. Potgieter, and a spy to boot, but you're a brave man, and, thanks to that little bit of temper of yours, I've got all out of you that I expected to get. At the same time, I'm afraid you're far too great a scoundrel to be allowed to return and corrupt the simple virtues of Mr. Kruger's peasant soldiers. I am sure your good President would agree with me that a white man who went back on his colour isn't fit to live—in fact, the dear old gentleman would shoot you himself for being found out, so you can't expect much mercy from me. Take him away and let him say his prayers if he wants to."

"You had better say yours soon, too, Butcher Carrington," the Boer shouted, his doggedness vanishing in a sudden flood of passion, "for you won't have much time to do it when the shooting begins. You can hang me, I'm only one, but there are thousands and thousands down yonder. All the Boers in South Africa are up by this time, and you English are going into the sea if you don't die sudden deaths before you get there. Soh Ja!"

The General waved his hand without speaking, and his guards marched the spy out of the tent. When he had gone Sir Frederick leaned back in his chair and said:

"Gentlemen, I'm afraid there's only too much truth in that. That fellow's the sort of liar who stumbles into the truth when he gets mad. The sooner we are on our way to Puri the better.

"Sir Richard," he went on, turning to the Deputy-Commissioner, "I shall suggest that you make the best of your way to Buluwayo with, say, four hundred men, for I've had to leave the place rather weakly defended. I shall get on down the road with the rest before night. We may as well know the worst at once. Anything is better than this uncertainty. Captain Turner, see that Captain Coope has his scouts out on the road within a couple of hours, and let him go cautiously, for there is no telling how far these fellows may have pushed their way up. Well, Ferguson, what is it?" he said to his aide-de-camp who had just come to the door of the tent.

The guard marched the spy out of the tent.

"Umzilizi, one of the Indunas, has come down from the kopje with two or three others and says he wants to *konsa** to you, General. I fancy they've had enough of it."

"Oh, he does, does he," said Sir Frederick, looking not a little relieved. "Well, bring him in, but let the others stop outside. I know Umzilizi, and he's not at all a bad fellow, but too ambitious for a nigger. Never could understand that a white man is better than a black one. Fetch him in and let me see what I can make of him."

He stood with his arms folded across his chest.

The aide stepped aside and beckoned, and a tall, splendidly-built man, whose scanty beard was just beginning to grizzle, stepped into the tent, and with a graceful motion, that was a singular combination of dignity and deference, saluted the General, and then stood straight up in front of him with arms folded across his chest. He wore the polished head-ring of the warrior and the "man,"† and a leopard-skin kaross, the sign of chieftainship, hung gracefully from his shoulders.

"Well, Umzilizi?" said the General sternly, and yet not harshly, and speaking in the Matabele dialect of the Zulu tongue. "So you want to *konsa*, do you. Are you tired of playing the fool and standing up in front of the little loud-speakers?"

Umzilizi bowed his head and said gravely:

"We are beaten, and we have been fools, for we listened to the voices of our worst enemies, the Amabuna‡ yonder. They told us they would help us to take our country back; now they are coming to take it from you and us too. Wau! we have been fools, but if the Great White Mother will take us back we will swear the faith, and we will fight for you against these liars if you will lead us."

"Is that true, Umzilizi?"

"I am Inkosi.§ I fought for the Great King and washed my spear when I was still a boy. I am an old man now, but I have not learnt to lie yet. May I be beaten to death by women, and may the dogs eat me if it is not the truth."

"That will do. I believe you," said the General. "Now, Umzilizi, I will make peace with you, and your people shall be forgiven all that is past on these conditions. First, you must bring all the arms that you have and lay them down here in camp. I may make a regiment of your young men afterwards, if they do wisely. Next, you must swear for yourself and your people, and all the other Inkosis and Indunas must swear, too, that not a man shall cross the Nuanetzi or go south from anywhere without leave from me. Lastly, you must give up to me Makone, if he is with you, and Chibi, and all the witch doctors, and smell out all the Amabuna who have come among you and brought you guns and set you on to fight, for these have done all the harm, and they must be punished."

"It is good, *Bubese Mninimandhla*; the conditions are light and generous, such as brave men may take from a great chief. It shall be done."

"Very well, Umzilizi. I trust to your honour as a chief and a warrior to see it done honestly, and the sooner it is done the better, for you have kept us too long here already; but mind, not one of the Amabuna must escape."

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* Speak civilly, treat with.

† One who has "washed his spear," and is allowed by the old Zulu laws to marry.

‡ Amabuna is the native term for Boers.

§ "I am a chief by rank."

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"The Ambuna are dogs and liars. I shall laugh when I see them die."

There was no mistaking the savage sincerity with which the old chief said this, and he was as good as his word, for as soon as the conference broke up he told his companions of the decision, and they at once ran towards the kopje from which the beaten rebels were now descending in crowds. They waved their arms, making signals to them and shouting, and instantly every man who was within earshot, and who had weapons in his hands, laid them down on the ground and stood stock still beside them, while the search parties that had been sent up came down in long lines, clearing out the rocks and bushes yard by yard so carefully that scarcely a meercat could have escaped.

He sprang into the air and dropped dead.

Then two Maxims were turned on the prisoners, and they were told that if any attempted to escape the little loud-speakers would begin to talk. Then Umzilizi and his fellow Indunas were told to range their men up in lines and "smell out" those who were wanted, and this they did with a readiness that showed how glad they were to get off the penalty of rebellion so cheaply.

Everything was done quite quietly and in order, save for one incident. One of the disguised Boers, knowing what was in store for him, took the chances of a bolt and ran for the open plain. He hadn't gone thirty yards before half-a-dozen rifles flashed at once, and he sprang into the air and dropped dead.

The rest had shrift almost as short. When Umzilizi had "smelt them out" they were tied up and had their faces washed with more expedition than ceremony. Then they were stood up against a wall of rock at the side of the kopje, with Mr. Potgieter in the midst of them, given fifteen minutes to prepare for death, and then shot, and as Trooper Jackson P. Bethell, of the Rhodesian Horse, justly remarked, "the average of the human race was raised a bit by their execution."

The chief, Makone, who had been responsible for the second rising in the North-east, and who had been proved guilty of several murders, Chibi, an ally in the first war who had turned traitor, the notorious and oft-slain M'Limo himself, and five of the so-called Indunas of the Gods, who had preached the rebellion in the first instance, with nearly a score of witch-doctors, were strung up without further ceremony on the first trees that came handy, and so ended the second and last Matabele war.

After a brief but serious conference with Sir Richard Martin and the staff officers, the General decided to form a regiment of a thousand picked men who had learnt to shoot decently well, commanded by Umzilizi and three other Indunas who had taken the oath of loyalty, but split up into four companies, and actually under the command of white officers who could speak their language, and further, to each company twenty-five troopers were attached in case of accident.

The four or five thousand who were left were soundly lectured, and then sent off to find their way back to their respective kraals, thoroughly cowed, but not by any means sorry to be so well out of a bad business.

Arms and a limited supply of ammunition were then served out to the others, who were almost beside themselves with pride at being allowed to fight under the Mighty Lion, and burning with eagerness to get at the Boers, whom they firmly believed had broken faith with them, as in fact they had, and were coming to take their country.

After this the camp was struck with all expedition. Sir Richard Martin struck out westward, *vid* Laing's Mine and the Insezi to Buluwayo, and the main force moved eastward over the hills to the eastward and down to the Pioneer Road.

For two days and nights they marched steadily on to the south, halting only now and then for a few hours, to rest man and beast, and then pushing on again, for every hour might be priceless. A few minutes after sunrise on the morning of the third day Captain Jessel-Coope, chief of the scouts, who was riding on with some of his men two or three miles ahead of the column, which was now about eight miles from the boat ferry over the Umzingwani, saw a cloud of dust down the road. His glasses went up and his men's rifles were at the ready in an instant.

A few moments later he saw a mounted figure in the midst of the dust-clouds. He threw up his hand and said: "It's all right, boys; you don't want to shoot. It's a woman. Great Scotland Yard, how she's coming! This means something bad, I'm afraid."

They put spurs to their horses and galloped on to meet the new-comer. Within ten yards of them she pulled up her labouring, panting horse, and as the scouts followed suit they saw, not a little to their surprise, that the "woman" was a slim built girl of about sixteen, with a face that would have been almost beautiful but for its ghastly pallor, with long, bright brown hair streaming over her shoulders from under the old felt hat that she had dragged down over her brows, and two big brown eyes that were staring blankly out from under the flapping brim.

"Do you belong to General Carrington's men? The Kaffirs told us you were coming," she gasped in a thick, husky voice that must have been very unlike her own, holding hard to the pommel of her saddle, and yet swaying unsteadily in it.

"Yes, we do," replied Captain Coope. "The main column is about three miles behind. What's the matter, miss? I'm afraid you're bringing bad news."

"Yes," she said in a voice that was almost a gasp. "It couldn't be worse. The Boers are all round Puri. More than a thousand of them have gone on to Buluwayo with some cannons. There are hundreds more waiting for you among the kopjes between the Sigabi and Selindila, and I believe they've got a machine gun with them. They've burnt out our homestead and killed father and mother and both my brothers, and I've ridden all night across country to tell——"

The last word ended in a long sigh, the girl's eyelids dropped, and she swayed backwards in her saddle and fell senseless into the arms of one of the scouts who had ranged his horse up alongside hers just in time to save her from falling to the ground.

CHAPTER XII.

Bad News from Home.

Never since the days of Rodney and Nelson had a British Admiral had such grave news to communicate to his subordinates as that which the captains and senior commanders of the British squadron in Delagoa Bay met in Admiral Dale's room on board the *Majestic* to hear.

As they were ushered in they saw him seated at his table with the contents of Mr. Michael Ostroff's dispatch-case spread out before him in little piles, showing that he had already arranged them systematically for reference.

They all waited anxiously for him to begin, for they knew that what was coming must be something very serious indeed. He began very quietly, but with the manner of a

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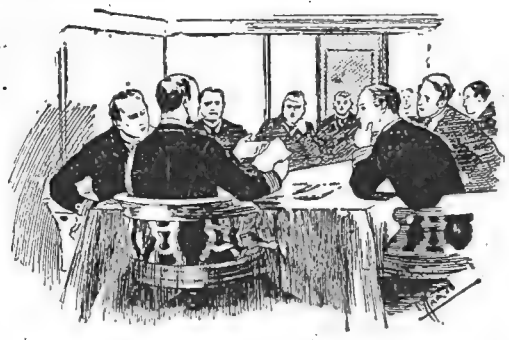
"We are beaten, and we have been fools; but if the Great White Mother will take us back we will fight for you."

man who knows that he was speaking words which might find their echoes in the future history of the world.

"Gentleman," he said, "as you may imagine, I have called you together to discuss a matter of the gravest importance, not only to ourselves and the squadron under my command, but also to the British dominions in South Africa, and possibly to the Empire itself.



The Admiral went on speaking more seriously.

"You know already that we were dispatched in somewhat of a hurry under sealed orders for the south, and, as you learnt at sea last night, those orders were to the effect that we were first to take possession of Delagoa Bay and, if necessary, enforce the treaty of purchase concluded between the British and Portuguese Governments, and then to hold ourselves in readiness to co-operate with the land forces in South Africa in the event of trouble in the Transvaal, which there is not much need for me to tell you has been anticipated for some time at headquarters.

"This morning, thanks to intelligence telegraphed down the coast, we were able to concentrate here in time to anticipate the seizure of the port by a German squadron, which I expect hourly, and to capture a Russian squadron for whose presence here I was, until an hour ago, unable to account.

"Most fortunately, however, when the *Thrasher* captured the *Sokol*, Lieutenant Stevens took prisoner a civilian in whose possession these papers were found, and they go far towards explaining the presence of the Russians here, and also towards laying bare an almost world-wide international conspiracy—for I can really call it nothing else—the purpose of which is obviously the severance of the whole of Africa from the British flag, preparatory, I suppose, to a general scramble for the plunder. But what is of the most immediate importance is the startling revelation that they make about the state of affairs actually existing in South Africa.

"Gentlemen," the Admiral went on, speaking even more seriously and impressively than before, "it is my painful duty to tell you that yesterday President Kruger tore up the Union Jack at the annual independence gathering at Krugersdorp, and proclaimed, not only the abrogation of the London Convention, but also a war of conquest or extermination against Her Majesty's dominions and subjects in South Africa. By now there are probably 50,000 men in the field, and I need not tell you what land forces we have to oppose them. Even granted that the Matabele question were disposed of, I doubt if we could at once put 6,000 men properly armed into the field against them.

"I have here a series of telegrams in duplicate; they are all in cypher, but happily the key to the cypher was in a secret pocket in the dispatch case which I discovered through the accident of having to cut it open. Translation of the telegrams showed them to be in French. They contain the most exact information as to the plans of the Transvaal Government—which, I need hardly say, is at the head of the conspiracy—the number of men, forts, guns, and amount of warlike stores, points to be attacked, and estimated strength—or rather weakness—of the loyal forces.

"These appear to have been obtained in some quite unaccountable way by a Russian agent in Pretoria without the knowledge of the Transvaal Government. They are evidently intended for the guidance of Russia in the case of her very probable intervention in the quarrel.

"Now you will agree with me, gentlemen, that this is bad enough in all conscience, but I am sorry to say that there is even worse behind it, for in addition to these telegrams I have found dispatches and memoranda which leave no doubt in my mind as to the existence of a long-standing and most skilfully-managed intrigue, emanating in the first instance from Doctor Leyds, the State Secretary of the Transvaal, the object of which is nothing less than the prevention by all means, fair or foul, of the interference of the Imperial Government in the protection of Her Majesty's South African dominions from internal revolution or foreign attack—in other words, to leave South Africa and its loyal population at the mercy of an overwhelming force of revolutionists."

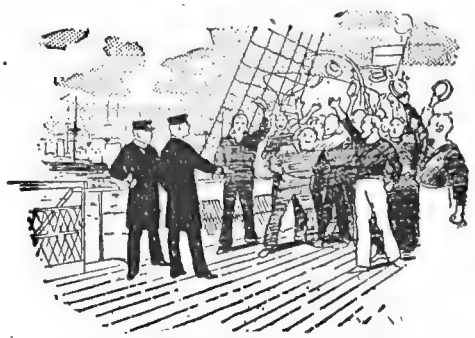
So far the assembled captains and commanders of the squadron had listened to the weighty words of the Admiral in silence. There had been not a few visible signs of discontent and not a little fingering of sword-hilts, but, of course, no one had spoken. When, however, the Admiral at length paused, as he did after the utterance of his last sentence, and looked round as though expecting some comment, the Captain of the *Magnificent*, who was the senior officer present, rose to his feet, and said in a tone of unmistakable indignation:

"But surely, sir, you do not intend us to gather from that that the squadron will return to England and leave our fellow-subjects in Africa to their fate?"

"No, it is hardly as bad as that, my dear Barlow," said the Admiral, smiling for the first time, "though I am glad to say at once that what you have just said indicates a spirit entirely in accord with my own, and, I believe, with that of every officer and man in the squadron."

An unmistakable murmur of acquiescence, which had somehow an angry sort of ring in it, told the Admiral that every man in the room was with him. He nodded in approval, and as the Captain of the *Magnificent* sat down, he went on, addressing him more particularly:

"I was going to say that this discovery, unpleasant as it is, has done something towards explaining a clause in the sealed orders, which I confess I was completely at a loss to understand. By it I am directed, in case of what are rather ambiguously termed 'unforeseen eventualities' to take measures in concert with Major-General Goodenough and Rear-Admiral Rawson at the Cape for assuming supreme



Every sailor on board volunteered for service.

naval command in South African waters, and co-operating with them in defence of the coast, and in the event of any unexpected developments to act absolutely at my own discretion and without reference to orders from home, which

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might not reach me in time to enable me to act with the promptness that necessity might demand.

"Well, now, gentlemen, whatever those words may have been intended to mean, what I propose to make them mean is just what they say. I take it that the necessity has arisen, and between ourselves I believe we were sent out here in the belief that it would arise.

"It will, of course, be our first business to see that, whatever success the revolutionists may have on land, neither supplies nor reinforcements shall reach them by sea, nor shall they have any communication whatever with the rest of the world, as I shall take possession of all cable-stations, and, if necessary, cut the cables. I shall press all the mail steamers into our service, and I am sure both the Union and the Castle lines will give us every assistance in their power. So far as I can prevent it, no news whatever shall reach Europe from South Africa until this business is settled."

Here the Admiral paused for a moment, and with a smile on his clean-shaven lips and a meaning twinkle in his keen eyes, dropped his voice and went on:

"And, gentlemen—strictly between ourselves, mind—I propose to take very good care that the cables shall not be capable of conveying any—well, I may perhaps say unacceptable—messages from home. I needn't remind you how convenient Nelson found his blind eye at Copenhagen. We could not have a more illustrious example to follow. We are on the spot, and should know best what to do. At any rate, we *will* know what is best.

"In short, if matters at home have really come to such a deplorable pass that the Government finds itself unable, through political complications or diplomatic intrigues, to protect its African dominions and subjects, we, and those who remain loyal to the flag, will do it by ourselves or perish in the attempt."

While this was happening in the Admiral's room the flag-captain of the *Majestic* was carrying out his orders with equal promptness and resolution. The Russian prisoners of war were taken out of their ships, disarmed, and landed under strong guards. Prize crews were placed on the captured vessels, which were at once thoroughly overhauled. The *Navarin*, being found hopeless, was run into the shallows to the south of the Bay, grounded, and blown up, after all her available guns and warlike stores had been taken out of her.

The three other ships—that is to say the battleship *Gangout* and the two cruisers *Rurick* and *Rossia*—were found to be available for almost immediate service. Thanks to their protective armour and the brevity of the engagement their hulls were practically uninjured and their engines perfect. The only damage they had suffered was in their top-works and lighter batteries, and even these had suffered nothing more than a fortnight or so at Cape Town and Simon's Town would suffice to repair.

It happened, fortunately, that just then Delagoa Bay was exceptionally full of shipping, mostly steamers flying the British flag. Among these were the Union Intermediate steamer, *Greek*, the Currie liner, *Pembroke Castle*, with four hundred and fifty men of the 2nd Leicestershire Regiment, under the command of Captain W. Pearson, bound for Beira, but stopped here by telegraph, and the two big six thousand-ton Bucknall liners, *Johannesburg* and *Fort Salisbury*.

The moment that the news of the war spread among them every English, Irish, and Scotch officer, sailor, engineer, and stoker on board of them volunteered for service to a man, and when it began to leak out that there was going to be a spice of privateering in the business, they were for going over the side at once and getting to work on board the captured Russian ships.

It happened also that there were four large German steamers—the German East-African mail boat, *Kanzler*, and three big cargo boats loaded with guns, ammunitions, and other stores for the Transvaal—and it was not very long before their captains received polite intimations to stop unloading *instanter* under penalty of being sunk where they lay.

He handed the paper to the Admiral.

Meanwhile, too, a strong force of marines had landed and took over possession of the quays, telegraph offices, signal-stations, and railway terminus, under strict orders to permit no communications of any sort to take place between the town and the interior, and the natives, enemies of the Dutch to a man, as all South African natives are, were told that the Great White Queen had declared war upon the Boers, and was coming to take the country back.

This stroke of diplomacy not only placed a small army of excellent spies at the disposal of the British Admiral, but further, when combined with the promise of prompt and liberal pay, gave him a very large supply of just the kind of labour that was wanted to put his plans into speedy execution.

It was getting on for two o'clock in the afternoon when the Council of War on board the *Majestic* was interrupted by the ringing of the Admiral's telephone. He went to it, listened for a moment, and said:

"Yes, by all means, send it here."

A minute or two later there was a knock at the door. When it was opened Lieutenant Ferris came in with a folded paper in his hand. He went up to the table, saluted, and handed the paper to the Admiral, saying:

"I thought I had better bring this myself, sir."

As the Admiral took it he looked up at the Lieutenant and said with a smile:

"I'm very sorry that we had to deprive you of that little run in the *Thrasher*, Ferris, but, never mind, there'll be plenty of fun for you yet. Now what's this?"

He had opened the paper meanwhile, and as he looked at its contents the smile died instantly from his lips. Lieutenant Ferris saluted again and disappeared, and as the door closed behind him the Admiral looked up and said very seriously:

"Gentlemen, the worst has come to the worst, and we have got to make the best out of it. Listen to this:

"'From Secretary of State for War to Admiral Commanding British Squadron, Delagoa. (Begins.) Your sealed orders confirmed in all particulars. Interpret last clause literally. Diplomatic complications in Europe preclude sending of further forces at present. Those in Africa at disposal of yourself and Goodenough, with whom you will act, absolutely at your own discretion and with full power to do what necessity may demand. No further orders. (Ends.)'

"No, and I'll take very good care that no further orders do reach me or anybody else," said the Admiral as he put the paper down on the table and struck it a sharp rap with his knuckles.

(To be continued.)

SHORT STORIES ABOUT PEOPLE.

We devote, every week, two pages of *Short Stories* to pithy, humourous anecdotes similar to those which appear in these columns. A prize of £1 1s. will be sent to the reader who submits the best storyette this week, and a copy of Grant Allen's "The Incidental Bishop" to each of those whose attempts are used. The anecdotes may be either original or selected; in the latter case the source *must* be stated. The prize of One Guinea offered for the best Storyette in this competition has been won this week by Mr. W. Lavers, 31, Asylum Road, Peckham, S.E. Attempts for this week's prize may deal with ANY SUBJECT and must reach the Storyette Editor, *Short Stories* Office, Henrietta Street, Strand, London, W.C., by Monday, March 26th. Post-cards only, please.

His Regiment.

AT an entertainment in the north of Ireland, on the evening of the relief of Ladysmith, the audience stopped the performance to sing the National Anthem.

So far this was all right, but more followed when a few excited young fellows caught sight of a man in uniform, and the wearer, despite his protests, was carried shoulder high in triumph round the hall.

When he regained *terra firma*, someone asked him for the name of his regiment, his uniform not being familiar.

"Regiment!" exclaimed the man. "Good heavens! Why, I'm the doorkeeper. What's the matter with you all?"

W. L.

Boat Ahoy!

A DRIVER of a water cart, returning from the well with water one night, was nearly startled out of his wits by hearing a voice hailing "Boat ahoy!"

He thought he was on board the transport again, until he again heard the hail, this time accompanied by the ominous sound of a rifle being brought to the ready, when he yelled out "Friend."

This brought the bluejacket who had challenged him to his senses, for he thought he was on his native element instead of the brown veld, and after mutual explanations had taken place the cart was allowed to proceed on its way.

C. S.

So Jones Paid.

THREE friends who had been spending the evening at their club agreed that the one who did not do as his wife told him when he got home, should pay for an oyster supper.

Smith, in trying to find the matches, trod on the cat.

"That's right," said his wife, waking up; "kill the poor cat and have done with it."

"Well," thought Smith, "I'll have to do it or pay," so he killed the family pet.

Brown in the dark stumbled against the piano.

"Why don't you break the piano?" demanded his wife.

Brown at once broke the piano.

When Jones got home he stumbled on the top step of the staircase.

"Go on," said his wife. "Tumble downstairs and break your neck."

"Not me," answered Jones. "I'll pay for the supper first."

H. H. R.

Better Off Than the Rest.

AN Irish soldier who had his leg amputated after the battle of Colenso, begged to be allowed to go again to the front when the wound was healed.

His arguments were as ingenious as his determination was great.

"You see, sir," he said to the doctor, "I should be better off than the others. If the Boers hit me where the leg's missing they wouldn't hit me at all."

C. M.

What It Will Come To.

"HARRY," exclaimed the blushing Laura, "this declaration is so sudden that I—that—I hardly know what to say. I was unprepared for it. It unnerves me."

"I was afraid it might," said the young chemist, rising with alacrity from his knees, "and I brought with me a bottle of my unrivalled nerve anodyne.

"This preparation, darling," he added soothingly as he took a bottle from his pocket, quickly extracted the cork, and poured a quantity of the medicine into the spoon he had also brought, "will allay any undue excitement, quiet the nerves and digestion, and restore lost appetite. I sell it at 2s. 9d. a bottle. This is the dose for an adult. Take it, dearest."

W. P.

No Returns of That Sort.

ONE evening an officer of a regiment with Buller saw a private soldier approach a comrade and say something to him. He was immediately knocked down by the latter.

"Here! what's the meaning of that, Sullivan?" demanded the officer of the aggressor.

"Sure, sorr," replied Sullivan, "Murphy was afther wishin' me manny returns of the day. It's me birthday to-day, sorr."

"Well, you ought to have thanked him for his kind congratulations, instead of striking him," said the astonished officer.

"Bedad, sorr!" cried Sullivan, excitedly, "yersilf doesn't know that in the foight to-day Oi got a nick out av me ear, a tooth an' me quid knocked down the throat av me, wan bullet through me wather bottle that was half full av real ould Oirish whisky, an' another through me only poipe. Afther such a day av disasthers, sure wasn't it the bad taste av Murphy to wish me manny returns av it?"

W. J. O.

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Not to Be Put Upon.

The following is a laughable instance of the extreme sensitiveness of the ignorant rustic, who suspects himself of being "put upon" by his betters.

At a tenants' dinner, given by a certain Suffolk squire, covers were laid for forty, and, on the guests going to the table, one of t em stared for a moment at the napkin laid in the place assigned to him.

"What's this 'ere?" taking it up suspiciously between his horny fingers. "I ain't a-going to woipe up moy platt-r, I know."

And looking excitedly to his companions for their approval, he hurled the offending napkin behind him and flopped into his seat with a grunt of indignation.

E. T. R.

A Ballot for a Husband.

A good-looking, well-to-do bachelor in Georgia, U.S.A., was being teased by the young ladies of a club for not being married. He said: "I'll marry the one of you whom, on a secret vote, you elect to be my wife." There were nine members of the club.

Each girl went into a corner and used great caution in preparing her ballot and disguising her handwriting as well as she could.

The result of the vote was that there were nine votes cast, each girl receiving *one*. The man remains a bachelor, the club is broken up, and the girls are mortal enemies, united in the one determination that they will never speak to that man again.

E. N.

Didn't Want Any Accident.

There was to be a review of a regiment of Lanarkshire militia, when the commander of the forces in Scotland was General Viscount Melville. The militia colonel had to read the word of command from a paper, which he did not even try to conceal. Lord Melville dashed about in a frenzy. At length the last manœuvre and final blow came.

"Form square! Make ready, present, fire!" was the word of command.

There was not a sound but the click of the locks.

"Colonel, what does this mean?" shouted the general.

"They have no powder," replied the colonel.

"No powder, colonel, for a field-day?"

"The fact is, general, sometimes the horses don't stand fire. Mine is very fidgety, and I thought it just as well the review should go off without an accident."

T. E. W.

A Fine Sermon.

A Sussex clergyman, having to be absent from the duties of his church on a certain Sabbath, secured the services of a very wise, grave, and reverend ecclesiastic for that day. The latter was a man of great reputation.

The only doubt his friend had was whether the visitor was not too learned for the country folk that he would have to preach to.

Returning in the following week the clergyman hastened to his parish clerk to inquire how the services of the preceding Sunday had passed off—in particular, how he had liked the sermon.

"Oh, sir," said the old clerk, in an ecstasy, "it was the finest sermon that I ever heard. I wouldn't presume to say that I understood a single word of it."

A. I. C.

Actors Don't Retire Early.

It was nearing midnight, and the young man at the front door had said good-bye to the girl for the manyth time, and the old gent, who was the father of the girl, had been listening over the banister at the top of the stairs until his feet were cold and he was tired.

"Good-bye, darling," the youth again murmured.

"I say," called the old man, "are you a star actor, George?" for the old gent knew the youth.

George gasped in alarm.

"No—no—no, sir," he stammered.

"Excuse me," called out the old gent, "I thought you must be, you keep up your farewell to her so long," and the old gent chuckled and got away nearly as soon as George did.

B. E. W.

The Retort Courteous.

One may be excused for feeling a little joy when the man who goes out of his way to make a rude remark in order to display his wit receives a rebuke that is as courteous as it is at the same time effective.

The retort given by a certain learned scientist must have been considerably more amusing to the onlookers than it was to the learned gentleman's antagonist.

It happened at a dinner that one of the guests began to deride philosophy and went on rudely to express the opinion that philosopher was but another way of spelling fool.

"What is your opinion, professor?" he asked. "Is there much distance between them?"

The professor, with a polite bow to his *vis-à-vis* responded gravely:

"Sometimes only the width of a table."

A. R. B.

Speed Indeed!

A printer and bookseller says that on one occasion an old woman from the country came into the printing-office with an old large-print Bible in her hand.

"I want," said she, "that you should print it all over again. It's getting a little sort of blurred, and my eyes is not what they was. How much do you ax?"

"Half a crown."

"Can you have it done in half an hour? Wish you would, want to be gettin' home; I live a good way out of town."

When the old lady went out, he sent round to the office of the Bible Society, and purchased a copy for half a crown.

"Sakes a massey!" exclaimed the old lady when she came back to look at it, "how good you've fixed it, and how quick you've done it. I never seed nothin' so curious as printers is."

S. I. M.

Not a Good Advertisement.

Friend: "I say, Daub, I suppose you heard about our house being broke into the other night?"

Artist: "No, I hadn't heard. Did they take much?"

Friend: "A couple of watches, some silver, a suit of clothes, and it's a funny thing, but you know that picture you painted me—they cut it out of the frame, and——"

Artist (interrupting excitedly): "By Jupiter, old man, you don't say so! Why, my fortune's made! Yes!"

Friend: "And nipped off with the frame, the beggars!"

Artist: "Ah, did they? It's rather funny, isn't it? Good-day!"

Friend: "Good-day!"

M. J. W.

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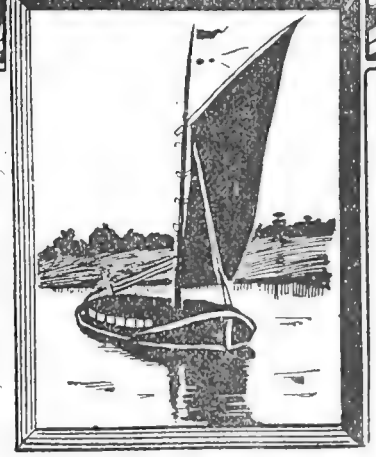

THE SHADOW ON THE PATH.

It is four o'clock. The drawing-room is trim and dainty. A quantity of pretty bibelots are scattered here and there. There are flowers everywhere. A tea-table with snowy cloth and delicate porcelain awaits visitors.

It is growing dark.

Madame Langlée is reclining at ease near the fire in the depths of a Louis XV. armchair. She is reading for the hundredth time a telegram received in the morning.

"I shall call to-day," it runs. "It is your day at home, I believe. Shall I see you alone? Alas, I fear not, though I desire it urgently.

(Signed), "Robert Sirieux."

Bertha glances at a jewelled clock on the mantlepiece, a gem of delicate workmanship. It is already half-past four.

She rises and wanders restlessly about the room, rearranging a fold of drapery, changing a cushion, tilting a flower. She is a woman of perhaps thirty, tall, slender, refined. In her trailing robe of violet velvet with a touch of creamy point, she is elegantly yet simply gowned. The sombre, rich hue of the velvet, relieved by the yellowish tone of the lace, throws out the dazzling tints of her fresh skin, the clear blue of her eyes, the tawny gold of her hair.

Madame Langlée is evidently possessed by unrest to-day. The dainty clock strikes the hour. She trembles. It is five o'clock. And, resisting no longer an inclination that overwhelms her, she runs to the window and presses her forehead against the cool glass. Her quick breath frosts the pane. The trees seem to take note of it and stare at her in astonishment. She drops the light curtain and retreats to her corner by the fire.

The darkness deepens and a servant enters quietly to light the lamps. It is a quarter past five. He hasn't come yet. Her fingers crumple the telegram, her thoughts are far away. This feverish uncertainty half-frightens, half-charms her.

"Will he come?" she says to herself. "He loves me, of that I'm certain. I cannot doubt it. He is coming to tell me that he loves me. The avowal that he began last night at the ball, among the flowers, with the sound of that waltz in our ears, he is going to repeat to-day in this calmer atmosphere, in the intimacy of my own home. He is coming, of that I am sure; and yet can I be sure—can I be sure of such a man—a man so fêted, so distinguished, so much sought after as he is—a man that a trifle might turn from me?"

Hark! a carriage stops, a door slams, there is the tingle of a bell! It is he! Ah, no, not he! There is a swish of silken skirts and a young fashionable woman enters.

"Oh, it is you, my dear girl!"

"Yes, it's I. I had just one moment and I stopped to say 'How do you do?' to you. Why, my dearie, how pale you are to-day?"

"No, no, I am not pale," said Mme. Langlée hastily. "Won't you let me give you a cup of tea?"

"Thank you. Do you know, my dear, how beautiful you were last night at the ball? It appears that Robert Sirieux found you bewitching. The effect of those roses in your hair was perfect. I saw him just a moment ago at the Baroness's. He spoke of you in a tone—well, my dear, I'll say no more. He wishes to paint your portrait for the salon. I heard him ask the Baroness to get your permission, and I've made haste to tell you about it, because, entre nous, the Baroness is madly in love with the handsome Robert herself, and you can guess how she received the commission."

"Did she say she would ask me?"

"Oh, yes, of course, she said she would be delighted and all that sort of thing, but immediately went on to say what a devoted wife you were, what an incomparable mother, and then she added that your husband, while a very fine man, is old, a greybeard, in fact, old fogyish beyond a doubt, and, that he would probably think Sirieux's request a little—well, a little impertinent? And now, my dear, I must go, I have so much to do, a dress to try on, a hundred little errands besides, but I wanted particularly to tell you about that conversation. Beware of the Baroness!" and with a soft rustle of lace and silk the pretty, girlish Countess departs.

* * * * *

The logs have burnt slowly, sending a warm glow throughout the room. The little clock strikes the half-hour, but Bertha does not hear it. She leans her head against her slender hand, pensively. She is thinking deeply, her eyes are dreamy. The chatter of the little Countess, who is gay and thoughtless and full of spirits as a bird, has suddenly cooled the fever of impatience that was burning in her veins. A healing calm steals into her mind.

The words of the Countess ring yet in her ears. So she has been talked about—already—in doubtful terms. She understands perfectly that her husband's name has been spoken with a shade of irony, and yet, after all,

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what has she done? She is beautiful, still young. She accepted for a moment, at a ball, where everyone could see, the arm of a man whom everybody was eyeing, an artist whose fame is made, a man whom it is the fashion to lionize. She scarcely knew him. She had accepted after a short conversation a rose, a favour of a cotillion that she had not danced. What did it all amount to? Nothing in reality, yet already people are gossiping about her, her husband, her children. Passionate resentment fills her heart. She rises, walks uncertainly across the room. Her fingers twist the bit of yellow paper. Just at this moment a carriage stops again. She trembles violently and with swift decision she turns, rings and says to the servant:

"I am not at home to anyone else. Say that I am indisposed."

The bell resounds. There is a moment's pause. Then the heavy door swings shut, and the sound of the carriage wheels dies away.

With a sudden throb of relief she slips to her knees in front of the fire and throws the fragments of the yellow paper into the flame. A joyous flaring blaze lights the room for a moment, then the charred scrap of paper floats lightly up the chimney. She smiles in spite of herself, pathetically, and resumes her languid position in the armchair.

It is a precious chair to her, a present from her husband after the birth of their son. She recalls with what tenderness he gave it to her, what care he had taken to see that it was soft and comfortable and deep, so that she might be at ease, happy to take up life again after her months of illness. It was in this armchair that she held her little son for the first time in her arms. Then with quickening recollection the picture rises again in her mind. The little fellow in the long clothes. They put him in her arms, then the nurses go away, and her husband comes and kneels at her feet. He takes the tiny hand of the baby in his, then her own slender white one, then he kisses them both softly.

In the midst of her reverie the door opens and M. Langlée enters. He is a fine vigorous man, with white beard and clear eyes, carrying bravely his sixty years. He comes to his wife's side. She raises her eyes. He sits down beside her and laughs a ringing youthful laugh.

"Why do you laugh?" she asks.

"Just let me tell you why, dear; as I was coming along the street who should I meet but that dunce of a little Feux, and he said to me with his insufferable air of importance—because he's twenty-five, you understand, and a member of the club, he thinks he need stop at nothing—'My dear Langlée,' he lisped, 'the news delights me; a portrait of Mme. Langlée by Robert Sirieux? It will be a beauty, the sensation of the salon, no doubt.'"

Mme. Langlée trembles and pales and steadying her voice with difficulty, asks: "And what did you reply?"

"Faugh! The little dandy looked so utterly inane with his hair parted down to the back of his collar and that ridiculous overcoat dangling to his heels, that I only burst out laughing; then recollecting myself, I made him a profound bow and said:

"'My dear Baron, accept my compliments. Madame Langlée will be delighted, no doubt, with this news that you are so good as to send her through me'—another profound bow—'my dear Baron.'

"The poor little Baron looked bewildered. And I, well, I laughed again, heartily, in a way those fellows no longer know how to laugh. It's said that laughter is French. That's true, but as to Frenchman, it is men of my class who are French, not those fellows. Our sons will be French if we bring them up in the good French fashion. As to that generation of manikins, with their London clothes and London manners, oh, they are too ridiculous!"

And again his fine ringing laughter fills the room.

* * * * *

It is seven o'clock. They are at dinner. There is a sparkle of crystal and a perfume of flowers. Mme. Langlée is lost in reverie. She is not eating. Her eyes wander from the silvery hair of the father to the blonde heads of the children. They are so happy and are chattering over the events of the day. The father answers their questions, playfully teasing them. She is saying to herself, "For just a moment's gratification because of a longing to taste a feverish emotion that is unknown to me, an excitement that I have read of, I was willing to go to him. Oh, the hideous disgust that would have followed—the lie, the sorrow—to have lived a shameful lie—to have felt myself unworthy of my husband, my children. How could I have weighed in the balance such treasures and such dross?"

She lives over the past. It comes back to her vividly. She recalls the days when she was a young girl just blooming into womanhood, when he, who is now her husband, came often to her father's house. He regarded her as a child, had the feeling for her that a father might have, and her pretty assumption of dignity amused him. She had listened to his words. His voice lingered in her ears. His fine, hearty, joyous laughter enlivened the whole household. He talked well, too: he said things to her which made her dream hours away when he was gone. And of all the number of young men who fluttered in the light of her smiles, she wished none. It was he whom she wished, he, he alone.

People said she was too young—a mere child, scarcely twenty years old—and he almost fifty, all the best part of his life gone. But such a life, however! What a noble life, full of wholesome pride, energy, independence, with a spice of audacity, perhaps, but that did not offend the girl. Was not the life of a man such as he a thousand times preferable for her? The thought that such a man should love her filled her heart with pride. The tenderness of his eyes, the tone of his voice when he spoke to her were so sweet. Such a husband would make her life so happy. He would be indulgent, would sympathise with her whims, would grant her everything.

"Every whim of yours will be granted," he had said to her on the day of her engagement. "Everything that is good for you, my little girl, you shall have. Everything that will be good for you to have it shall be my joy to give you. We'll gather all the flowers along the path, every one, every one, sweetheart; but those things which are like the nettles of the fields, the thorns, those we will leave. They would do you harm."

His voice had been so tender, so caressing when he said this. She could hear it yet, Then she had taken his hand, she had kissed it.

"You shall decide these things always for me," she had replied.

She knew why she had spoken so to this lover. It was because he had lived a clean life of which she was proud and had before him a future still large, an autumn full of promise.

Ten years of her life with him have passed—happy upright, full of mutual confidence and love. She has two lovely children and a husband who is as devoted as on the first day. She has lived happily, and now, after

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ten years, a shadow has fallen on her path, the first! A ball-room, a young and brilliant man, a lion of the hour as yet unknown to her. This man crossed her path, thought her beautiful.

"Who is this woman?" he asked.

"Madame Langlée," someone had answered.

"Ah, the wife of Langlée?"

He came up to her, offered her his arm. She felt herself thrill strangely. This man was sort after by woman. But he did not speak to her in terms that he chose for other women. She realised that. She felt the subtile fascination of his manner. He had brought her an ice and his fingers had brushed hers as he handed it to her. As she was going he had given her a rose, a flower perhaps meant to be cherished by her in memory of him. Then the telegram this morning.

"And why has he dared all this?" she whispers to herself. "Because for one instant I could not turn my eyes from his. In that instant he read consent in them. So for a moment I forgot my duty, betrayed a sacred confidence. In a moment's madness I would have sacrificed—lost, all the happiness that is mine, the life that I chose willingly—in an instant of forgetfulness I would have ruined it."

A wave of shame swept over her.

"What is the matter, dear one?" asked her husband. "You are so silent this evening. Are you not well?"

"No," she said aloud, "my head aches a little."

"Already I am driven to a lie!" she whispered to herself.

* * * * *

An hour later, after the children have been sent to bed, M. Langlée comes to his wife.

"Bertha, dear, there is something wrong. I can see it. Tell me what it is. It troubles me."

Then, overcome by the tenderness that he shows for her unfailingly, she kneels before him, puts her burning face in her hands, and shaking with emotion, she sobs convulsively. He, surprised, waits silently till she is calmer, softly stroking her bowed head.

"Bertha, dearie, tell me what it is."

She raises her head and turns to him her eyes filled with tears.

"Forgive me, love." She says, slowly, simply, "I found one of the poisonous flowers that you told me about, among some thorns on my path. The thorns have wounded me but the flower—oh, my husband I did not gather it and I am so glad. You see," stretching out her hands wet with tears, "the thorns hurt me, the blood flows yet. But the flower, husband, is gone; it is far away, it has withered."

And he, understanding suddenly, is filled with a great pity for her, feels a deeper affection for her than ever; he stoops and kisses her forehead.

"Bertha, little woman, don't cry. We cannot control our thoughts. They run far from us in paths where we do not wish them to go. It is our will that brings them back. The perfume of a flower intoxicated you but you resisted; you are enobled, not degraded in my eyes. What would be the merit of constancy if uncertainty, temptation, choice did not exist? I love you, wife, more than ever. My love cannot change."

And Mme. Langlée, doubly grateful for her refound happiness, lifts her head and encircles her husband with her loving arms; then, in a burst of thankfulness and love, she whispers in his ear the passionate avowals of their first happy days together, truer, deeper, more living to-day.

E J. Lovyen.

THE PRINCESS OF WALES'S

OPINION OF

PEARSON'S WAR PICTURES.

Mr. G. Vicary, of 110 Newington Butts, S.E., writes:

"You will doubtless be interested to learn that during the visit yesterday (March 7th) to Rowton House of H.R.H. the Princess of Wales, H.R.H. did me the honour to inspect the bookstall I conduct there, and from amongst the numerous periodicals displayed, many of which H.R.H. examined, she was graciously pleased to purchase a copy of the current number of Pearson's WAR PICTURES, remarking that it was very good indeed."

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READER OF "PEARSON'S WEEKLY"

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THE EXACT DAY

UPON WHICH THE

British Flag will be Officially Hoisted in Pretoria.

ALL YOU HAVE TO DO.

Fill in the accomp nying coupon.
Send it in to us as soon as you like.
Send as many coupons as you like.

If two competitors name the exact day the money will go to the one who gives the correct hour of that day. If two or more give the correct day and hour the £250 in full will go to him whose coupon we received bearing the earliest date of sending in. Pretoria time, which is about one hour and three quarters in advance of English time, must be stated.

The Editor's decision must be final, and competitors must only enter on that understanding.

The Editor reserves the right to close this competition at a day's notice.

Address all envelopes to "War Editor," Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

We shall take it that competitors mean the year 1900, unless they state otherwise.

This notice and coupon also appears every week in the ILLUSTRATED WAR NEWS, HOME NOTES, PEARSON'S WEEKLY, SUNDAY READER, and the BIG BUDGET.

Pretoria Coupon. S.S.] March 24, 1900. Date of Writing .....

Name.....

Address .....

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Day..... Hour..... (Pretoria Time.)

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One hundred per cent!

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1. Preventive of Colds, Chills, Influenza, &c.
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3. Stimulant and nourisher under all circumstances.
4. Aid to the Cook in the Kitchen.

WIPED OUT.

TOLD BY A CHAPLAIN.

I HAVE met with a sad story since I have been out here with the troops.

One afternoon after I had been talking to a company of infantry in the camp near Gras Pan, a young private asked to see me alone.

He began in a somewhat halting, and yet semi-excited way, to tell me he was in great distress.

In as kindly a manner as possible I asked him to make a confidant of me, promising to help him if I could.

"Well, sir," he said, speaking with great rapidity and earnestness, "I got into trouble at home. My father is a well-to-do man in Myvern and I was articled to an architect. Somehow I got mixed up with a gambling crew.

"As so often happens. I suppose, though I was fool enough not to see it, I went from little to more, risked money belonging to the firm with which I was articled; lost it; failed to replace it; and might have stood in the dock had not the firm sent for my father.

"I shall never forget the look he gave me. He has been a good father to me but lacking in sympathy. I am sure I should have taken flight had I known he was being sent for.

"He simply turned on me with a cold stare which froze the blood in my veins, and in a voice, harsh even for a naturally severe man, said:

"'I had rather you had died. You are no son of mine, I disown you. Go and wipe this out, if you can!'

"Slinking away like the whipped cur I was, I strove to drown my shame in drink.

"I have only a half recollection of what immediately followed, but dimly I afterwards realised that I determined to enlist; that I went as I was to Ethel Best, my *fiancée*; that I came away with her words burning into my brain on the top of those of my father's—'Yes, Jack, go and wipe it out. It will break my heart if I see you again before you have done it.'

"She looked, sir, like some priestess commanding a sacrifice. I simply dare not call her back as she rushed from me. I went out sobered, determined to wipe it out. I enlisted; and here I am.

"What I want you to do is this—I have sent several drawings home through Mr. Dent the artist. The money he promises is being sent here. It will pay my debt with interest. I want you to receive it and should anything happen to me send the money to Messrs. Jott and Tally, of Myvern, get the receipt, and send it to my father, and a copy to Ethel Best."

He was a splendidly-built, bright, handsome-faced young fellow, who looked capable of anything but meanness; and I immediately promised that I would do as he wished, and after I had added a few words of encouragement he withdrew.

The battle of Gras Pan took place next day. Our men fought magnificently and won a splendid victory against odds of positions and numbers.

After the fight I fell in with the Captain and found him full of enthusiasm over a splendid deed of heroism of one of his men.

He had not got very far with his story when I discovered his hero was no other than my young penitent.

I just write down what he said:

"You will have heard, Chaplin, of the warm corner we got in and how we carried the spur of the kopje from which Cronje's men were doing their most serious work. Well, as a matter of fact, it seemed certain we should be smashed back again, for they were fully three to one. I rallied my men, however, and led them forward at the double. No sooner had I done so than I got this beastly shot in the ankle, whilst Gower, my subaltern, was shot dead. As I lay there with bullets whistling and spitting all round me, I thought it was all over with us, for our lads were leaderless, when to my amazement I saw young private Wise leading them on and fighting like a lion.

"He seemed to bear a charmed life. Four Boer marksmen popped their ugly faces over the rocks and fired nearly point blank at him, but on he went, cheering madly.

"Leaping over the boulders he bayoneted one man, brained another with the barrel of his rifle, jabbed a third right through, and was floored by the fourth from the rear.

"I yelled to the others to help him, but before I could get the words properly out he was up and on that Boer like a tiger. He had lost his rifle, but he simply whirled the man off his feet and crashed him at a group of astounded Boers who dare not fire for fear of their comrade.

"They were floored by the impact; the thrown man was killed; and before I could make anything further out, the trenches were ours.

"By gad, sir, I have never seen anything like it. If he does not get his V.C. before we get to Pretoria, it will only be because he gets a Mauser bullet through him."

Off he hobbled, for his wound had not proved a serious one, and he declined to be altogether relieved of duty, but his radiant face suggested that he was willing to hobble or bear anything to lead such men.

I met my young friend next day. I had only time to grip his hand as he hurried past on duty; but as I whispered "You are wiping it out," a look of exultation passed over his face, which for the moment literally transfigured him.

The sequel came after the Battle of Modder River. Passing over the stricken field with the ambulance corps, I was startled to find young Wise apparently dead.

He was close to the river and the saturated clothing suggested he had been in it. His skull had been smashed by a shot in the rear.

As the light flashed in his face he opened his eyes,

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THE LANCET: "An excellent Jelly, possessing a flavour of quite a natural character."

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FREE SAMPLE on receipt of post-card. S. CHIVERS and SONS, Histon, Cambridge.

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Every man suffering from Varicocele and the allied troubles, should send for treatise, describing their Causes, Symptoms, Results, and Successful and Painless Treatment without surgical operation or the use of cumbersome trusses and electrical appliances. Will be sent sealed, post free, three stamps.

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If you have, Use "Antexema" It gives immediate relief as soon as applied and ultimately cures. Sold by chemists and stores, or post free for 1/3 and 2/9 from the Antexema Co., 83, Castle Road, London, N. W.

Write, naming this paper, for a FREE TRIAL SAMPLE.

ALL FAT PEOPLE

can safely **Reduce Weight and cure Corpulency permanently** by taking **TRILENE TABLETS** (Regd.) for a few weeks. They are small, agreeable, harmless, and never fail to IMPROVE both HEALTH and FIGURE without Change of Diet. An English Countess writes: "*Your Trilene Tablets act admirably.*"

Send 2s. 6d. to **THE TRILENE CO.,** Sole Proprietors, **66 Finsbury Pavement, London.**

SAMPLES OF TESTIMONIALS.

Princess Liechtenstein writes from Landsberg, Austria: "Pray send your excellent tablets directly." Mr. Canham, 87 Alexandra Road, Norwich: "Tablets cured my wife of extreme stoutness; it has never returned." Mrs. H. Cox, 28 Watnall Road, Hucknall Torkard, writes: "The Tablets reduced me 1½stone." Mrs. S. Alexander, 102 Dixon Street, New Swindon, says: "They reduced me 2½lb., and I am cured." Mrs. Darnley-Smith, of Landscove Vicarage, Ashburton, says: "Tablets have reduced me very much." Mrs. Crossley, of Rose Hill, Torver, Comston, says: "I weigh much less and can breathe so much easier; I am delighted."

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CURED. This can be done with or without patient's knowledge. Send me a stamp and I will tell you how. (Send no money.) Address, in confidence, Mrs. C. H. (Room 8), 125 Oxford Street, London, W.

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THE VERY BEST. FREE or FIXED WHEELS The most up-to-date. Carriage Paid.

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BILIOUS & NERVOUS DISORDERS,
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Prepared only by the Proprietor,

THOMAS BEECHAM, St. Helens, Lancashire.

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suddenly sat up, and with eyes literally ablaze shouted:

"They have the ammunition now, we can hold out till morning! —ah—it—is—wiped out!"

And he fell back dead.

Two days afterwards I succeeded in discovering two of his company who were with him. Both were wounded; but the more intelligent of the two, told me what had happened.

"It was this way, sir, Jack Wise was amongst those of us who first reached the river.

"It was a hot place I can tell you, and Bill, yonder, who got hit early on, would have been drowned but for Jack, who leapt into the water and got him out, whilst the Boers, who do not seem to have an ounce of chivalry in them, concentrated their fire on him, although it was clear what he was doing.

"We lay for some time under cover, and I can tell you we gave it them all the more hotly because of Jack's narrow escape, for he was a favourite with us all.

"As our supports came up we were ordered to try to cross. Jack and I were the first to succeed. I should never have managed it but for him, for I got hit as you see, sir, and he half carried me to the bank.

"Here we kept gaining in strength and by dint of ceaseless fire made our position good.

"Then our ammunition gave way, and the Captain asked for volunteers to fetch more. Two were shot in the attempt, but Jack got across and came back through a perfect rain of Mauser bullets with ammunition for us all.

"It became necessary to send a message across again, and once more Jack volunteered.

"What exactly happened I could only half see, for I was almost helpless; but I saw him reel as he emerged from some bushes and gesticulated to the officer commanding our reserves.

"That was all, sir; but if ever a man proved himself a soldier, and a trump at that, it was Jack Wise. Aye he'd a been something if he'd lived!"

I turned away with heart too full to even speak. Jack Wise had indeed "wiped it out."

Next day I wrote to his father telling him all. I have since received a reply from the old man. It was penned by a hand evidently usually firm but now just as plainly halting and shaky. It simply thanked me, and closed with a sentence whose heartfulness was only too plain:

"May God forgive me for my cruel words—May I have grace to wipe it out half as really as he."

This week I received a newspaper giving the names of volunteer nurses who are coming out. The first on which I really set my eyes read "Ethel Best of Myvern."

T. T.

BOAT RACE COMPETITION.

ON Saturday, March 31st, the Oxford v Cambridge Boat Race will take place. There is every reason to believe that the contest will be an exciting one, and so that our readers might take additional interest in the national event we offer a Prize of £5 to the sender of the coupon, printed below, giving most nearly correct: (1) The Winning Boat; (2) the distance separating the two boats at the finish; (3) the time taken by the winning boat in the race. The third condition will only be used to decide the actual winner of the prize in the event of more than one giving equally correct answers to the other two questions.

The Judges' decision of the race will be our standard for making the award.

Having filled up the coupon to your thinking, sign your name and address in the space provided on the left and get two friends to sign their names and addresses on the right. In the event of your winning the prize they will each receive £1. Competitors may send in any number of attempts, all of which may be signed by the same witnesses.

In the event of two or more competitors qualifying for the first prize, the £5 will be equally divided. The witnesses will also share in the same way.

Up to the present time fifty-six races have been rowed. Oxford have won thirty-two and Cambridge twenty-three races, the 1877 contest being a dead heat. Cambridge won last year by 3¼ lengths, the time being 2 min. 4sec. Oxford won the races for the preceding nine years, their times being from a minimum of 18min. 47sec. to a maximum of 22min. 15sec., and their wins during that time from half-a-length to thirteen lengths.

All envelopes containing coupons should be addressed: "Boat Race Competition," *Short Stories*, 17 Henrietta Street, London, W.C., and should reach us not later than the first post, Wednesday, March 28th.

"SHORT STORIES" BOAT RACE COMPETITION COUPON.

TIME OF WINNING BOAT:

Winning Boat: .....

Min. / Sec.

Distance Won by: .....

Competitor. .....

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Witnesses. .....

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THE GREATEST EDUCATIONAL PASTIME OF THE AGE.

DON'T STOP

looking at it. Buy one from your newsagent, or send to us for one and

WIN THIS PRIZE

So simple anyone can do it, and all have an equal opportunity.

PRICE 1/-. *POST FREE, 1/1½.*

From C. ARTHUR PEARSON Ltd., Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

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The Brain Gymnasium.

In these competitions a prize of £2 will be awarded each week to the competitor whose attempt we receive giving the correct solutions of all the puzzles. If more than one is absolutely correct the prize of £2 will be given to the first correct attempt dealt with.

If no lists of absolutely correct solutions are sent in the first prize will be awarded to the competitor whose attempt is first dealt with showing the fewest mistakes.

Each week we shall award in addition to the above, either ten of our silver plated pencil-cases or ten popular six shilling novels to be distributed amongst the competitors whose attempts are absolutely correct and have failed to win the first prize, or, if no complete lists of correct solutions are received, to those whose attempts show the fewest mistakes.

Write all your solutions on one sheet of paper, putting the number against each. Post the batch in an envelope marked "Brain Gymnasium," to reach the Editor, Short Stories, 18 Henrietta Street, Covent Garden, W.C., by Monday, April 2nd, 1900.

No. 70.

The name of a well-known poet, and one of his works, are hidden in the following words:

SWARM—TRIAL—IT—ROOM—SCENT.

No. 71.

Five well-known writer's names enigmatically expressed:

An encampment and a nautical term; vocal sounds and merit; arid and a cave; extended and a companion; a servant.

No. 72.

N I N I R O S I S I T O T I T I.

Form a sentence with the above letters so that no two vowels nor two consonants come together. The words employed are to be all of the same length.

No. 73.

T I S D N I
O B S Y I N D L
T O L L
H G A D T O W B
W I O N O A

Re-arrange the letters in the horizontal lines so that the whole, read downwards, will give a familiar proverb.

No. 74.

The initials of the names of the following will give a well-known river:

A coin.
A foe.
An ornament.
A big animal.
A small animal.
A labourer.

No. 75.

Re-arrange the vertical lines so that, read horizontally, a well-known saying, often misquoted, will appear.

T H H A E T M C O P
E S L A I G N A I S
I S T W H I I L L S
H I O S F O O W N P
I O I N N S L T I L

RESULT OF BRAIN GYMNASIUM.

Nos. 46 to 51.

These competitions are being taken up so well by our readers that no less than one hundred and four competitors gave correct solutions of all the puzzles appearing in the issue dated February 24th.

It would be unsatisfactory to attempt to share the prize of £2 amongst this large number, so we are setting an anagram to be competed for by these one hundred and four only, and are writing each one to that effect.

We would call competitor's attention to the alteration we have made in the apportioning of the awards, and feel sure that the new conditions will give more satisfaction to all.

SOLUTIONS TO PUZZLES

Nos. 52 to 57.

No. 52. I — O — I.

No. 53. Daffodil; dahlia; add-half-foil-aid; lid-of-fad; ail-had.

No. 54. REEL—APT; PRELATE—RELATE—ELATE—LATE—ATE.

No. 55. PLEA—SURE.

No. 56. AGE—GAME—IMAGE.
ENIGMA—MEANING—MENACING.

No. 57. CHAMBERLAIN:
Coldstreams,
Horse,
Arms,
Militia,
Brigade,
Ensign,
Roll,
Lieutenant,
Artillery,
Infantry,
Natal.

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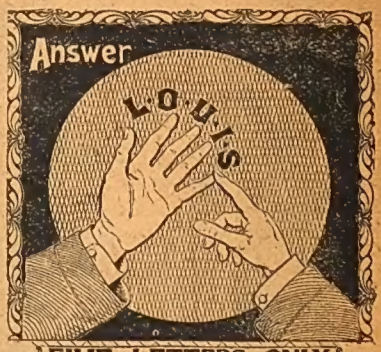

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